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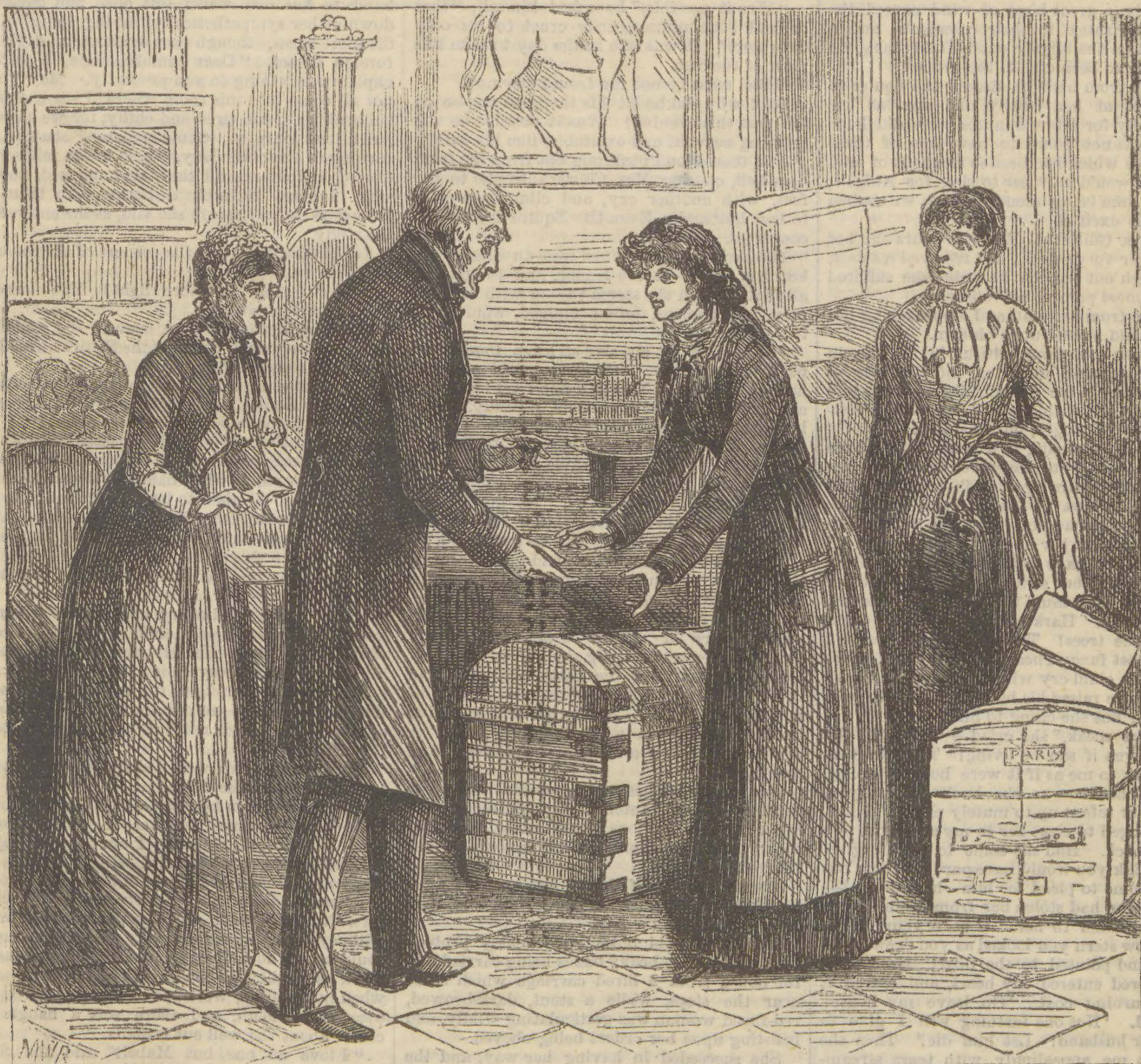
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"IT IS GRANDPAPA AND GRANDMAMMA."

A Wicked Heart; or, The False and the True.

BY SARA CLAXTON.

CHAPTER I.

EVENING was fast closing in; the storm, which had been threatening all day, seemed but to wait for the last red streak, left on the horizon by the setting sun, to fade away, ere it came down with a fearful fury.

The trees in Chiltern Park swayed back and forth in the wind which remorselessly tore from them the leaves that the autumn had already

turned to brown and gold. There were huge oaks, though, which refused to bow their heads or bend in the blast; and the storm, as if in revenge, snapped off branch after branch, and hurled them to the ground.

The Manor, with its heavy masonry, frowned ominously in the gathering gloom; scarcely a light shone from its windows. No sounds of merriment were ever heard within its walls.

Most of the servants had grown old in the Squire's service, and they had learnt to mount the broad oak staircase, and move about the long corridors and disused rooms softly, doing their work noiselessly.

Sometimes a young housemaid, new to the place, would laugh out merrily, but the sound would die away on her lips, for no one joined in her mirth, her fellow-servants only regarding her with surprise and

wonder. Soon she too would forget to smile, and in a few months become as gloomy as the rest.

Squire Chiltern was in his study, poring, as usual, over his books, reading by the light of a shaded lamp.

His features were stern, and there were hard lines about his mouth; his shoulders were bent with constant study; his hair, thin and perfectly white, fell over the collar of his coat. He passed most of his time in the room he now occupied, and was generally alone. This evening, however, his wife, frightened by the storm, had crept here from her own apartment, and silently sunk into a chair near the fireplace. The fitful glow from the fire fell upon her, causing her pale features to look almost ghastly. Her countenance wore a look of the greatest terror; her eyes, unnaturally distended, were fixed on vacancy; her hands clasped and unclasped themselves nervously.

Presently, a great blast of wind caused the windows to rattle in their casements, and a heavy fall on the terrace outside told that some large tree had been cast to the ground.

A shriek from his wife caused the Squire to look across at her hastily, and gaze at her thoughtfully for a few minutes. He did hope that she was not going to have one of those nervous fits which had been so frequent of late. Perhaps it would be wiser to ring for Abigail; he did not like being alone with his wife when she became excited.

Poor Mrs. Chiltern! Eighteen years ago her mind, never very strong, had received a shock, and, though not exactly imbecile, she suffered from the most painful nervousness.

She rose from her seat, and, approaching her husband, laid a hand upon his arm.

There was something pitiful in the way in which she touched him; fear of him was so plainly shown in her half-shrinking figure and the tremble of the thin white hand which rested, half-deprecatingly, on his sleeve.

"William," she said, in a voice little above a whisper, "do you remember what day this is? Eighteen years ago, on just such a night as this, she left us. 'No, no,' she continued, as he shook her hand off roughly; 'I am not going to mention her name. I promised you I would not, and have not broken my word in all these years; but something makes me think of her more than usual this evening. Perhaps it is the storm. Hark how it moans and sighs through the trees! There!—do you hear? I could almost fancy I heard a child's voice, just as I heard her child cry when you cast them out.'"

The Squire raised his hand as though to push her away; but she clung to him.

"I must speak," she cried—"I must! Oh, to know even if she be living! To-night it all comes back to me as if it were but yesterday. I can see her now as she knelt before you, holding her infant up to mutely plead with her. How I longed to clasp her in my arms, but you held me back. Had she come to ask forgiveness, I think you would have pardoned her; but she had come to plead for him—her husband—the man who had stolen her from us, and you would not listen to her. I hear your words now. How stern you looked as you drew yourself up, and pointed to the door! Each word you uttered entered my heart, and seared it like a burning coal. 'Go, leave my house!' you cried. 'Not one farthing will I give to save your husband! Let him die!' Then she turned to me, appealingly, with tears streaming down her cheeks; but I was spellbound—powerless to move. I tried to go to her—tried to speak, but my limbs refused to obey me; no words would come. She had sent the fly, by which she had come from the station, back to Blexby; for she thought we would surely keep her that one night, but you would not let her stay. Out into the wind and rain she went, pressing her little frightened baby to her breast. And, oh! worse than all—far worse than all!" she wailed—"thinking that I, her mother, was also harsh to her; that I had let her go without one kind word, without one effort to detain her!"

Her voice rose almost to a scream, and sinking down on her knees, she covered her face with her hands.

"Why will you agitate yourself in this way?" said the Squire. "Mabel sacrificed all consideration from us when she left her home to become the wife of that beggarly Italian artist. Confound him!" he went on, angrily. "I shall never forget his airs of equality, nor the cool, impudent way in which he asked for my daughter—as though he never dreamed of a refusal, when all the time he must have known I had as good as promised her to Wilfred Gray."

The Squire was gradually working himself into a passion, entering into the details of his fancied wrong, and trying to justify himself for the harshness of his conduct.

But, somehow, now that so many years had passed, he could not help viewing it in a different light.

"Was it possible," he asked himself, "that he had been unnecessarily cruel to his only daughter?" It was late in the day to take this view of the case.

Mabel must be not far from forty now.

Bah! why did he let his thoughts rest so on the past this evening? Was it possible he was growing nervous and excitable, like his wife?

Just then a loud peal rung out from the front door-bell, causing Mrs. Chiltern to rise to her feet, with another cry, and cling once more to her husband. Even the Squire looked disconcerted.

The arrival of a visitor was an almost unheard-of event at the Manor, and to-night of all nights, with the storm raging with unabated fury, few persons, unless obliged, would care to venture out.

"It is she!" in an awe-stricken tone whispered the old lady. "I felt something would happen to-night. You will not send her away again, William?" she went on, pitifully. "She knew you could not really mean her to walk all the six miles to Blexby through this dreadful storm. There," she said, smiling feebly through the tears which coursed each other down her withered cheeks, "let me go and meet her, and bring the baby in here to the fire. Poor little thing, it will be quite cold."

The poor lady's thoughts had gone back to that night so long ago, fancying only some minutes had elapsed since Mabel had been refused shelter. All forgotten were the eighteen weary years of sorrow which had slowly dragged themselves along since then.

In the meantime, the hasty summons had been answered. There were now sounds of voices in the hall. A woman was speaking broken English in a high-pitched tone. A gentler voice now and again interposed more quietly.

Mrs. Chiltern's heart died within her as she listened, a look of intense disappointment stealing over her anxious countenance. Neither spoke in the well-remembered accents of her beloved daughter.

Tremblingly she followed her husband, who had gone to the door of the study, and they both looked into the hall.

Malpus, the old butler, was weakly protesting against some heavy boxes being carried into the house from a hired carriage which stood near the steps, while a stout, dark-browed, red-faced woman was gesticulating wildly, and insisting upon her orders being obeyed.

She succeeded in having her way, and the last of the trunks was soon deposited on the polished floor.

A young girl, tall and exquisitely beautiful, half reclined with infinite grace against the old-fashioned carved fireplace, and regarded the discussion that was going on near her with an indolent expression, half-scornful, half-amused.

Presently she caught sight of the old couple standing near the study door, and, with a smile, approached them.

"It is grandpapa and grandmamma!" she said, in sweet, soft tones. "I should have recognized you anywhere from dear mamma's

description of you. Ah, how often we have talked of you!"

There was not a shade of embarrassment in her manner, and before the Squire well knew what she was about she had thrown her arms around his neck and embraced him warmly. He was so taken aback, so altogether startled and bewildered, that words failed him.

It was Mrs. Chiltern who now looked the more composed of the two. She passively allowed the young girl to kiss her, but did not return the embrace.

"I do not know you," she said, in accents that were almost fretful. "You are not Mabel. Why do you come here; and why do you call me grandmamma? I have only one grandchild—she is a little baby, a little weak child; I heard it cry as it left the house. I hear it cry now very often when the wind moans in the trees."

The girl took both the old lady's trembling hands in her own warm soft ones, and gazed down at her sympathetically, saying, in clear, distinct tones, though not without a slight foreign accent, "Dear grandmamma, I will explain everything to you presently. May we not all come into this room where I see a fire is burning? I am tired and chilly, for we have had a long journey. Come madame," she said, turning to the other lady, "help me to tell my dear grandparents all that has happened, and why I come to seek a home with them. How dark it is in here!" she said, as she entered the study.

The shaded lamp left the corners of the room in obscurity.

"May I ring for more light? You have hardly seen me yet."

Without waiting for an answer, she pulled the bell-rope, which none but the Squire himself had dared touch before.

"I must be as a daughter to you now," she said to the Squire, as if in apology. "I do not want you to look upon me as a stranger."

From the first she seemed to master the situation. Sinking on her knees before the fire, she held out her small white hands to the warmth.

"Ah, I am so glad to be home!" she murmured as if to herself. One would have thought she was a loved daughter of the house just returned after a short absence.

The Squire resigned himself to the inevitable.

He, who had ruled every one with a rod of iron, seemed gentle as a child in the presence of the young girl. He felt that he should let her have her own way, ask what she would.

She took everything so for granted—was so sure of a welcome—so certain that her arrival at the Manor could not but be a pleasure to them.

When the candles were brought she rose and took a seat near the old lady.

Then, smiling on her, she said, "Look at me well, grandmamma; tell me if you do not think you could love me. I am not like my mother in appearance, but I will try to love you both as much as she would have done."

It was a beautiful countenance on which Mrs. Chiltern gazed. A pale olive complexion, with eyes almost unnaturally dark, that one could not fathom, fringed by long silky lashes black as night; lips small and red; but these, when not smiling, were apt to close too firmly over white teeth, and there was a haughty curve about the well cut nostrils.

"I love no one but Mabel!" said the old lady, turning away her head, and beginning to rub her hands together in the old nervous way. "Where is Mabel? Did not some one say she was coming?"

"There—there! come this way, and speak to me!" said the Squire to the young girl, who was looking a little surprised at the way in which her advances were received. "You have told us of yourself, but you have not informed us who this lady is—not related to your father, I suppose?" he added, determined, if such were the case, to make some show of resistance should she contemplate remaining here also.

"Oh, I beg your pardon; I had quite forgotten. This is Madame Veroust, my dear friend and governess. I hope you will allow her to remain with me for a time, for she has been very good to me since my darling mother died."

"Dead!" echoed the Squire. "Your mother dead! When did she die?"

"Dear grandpapa, it is all such a long, sad story. May I not postpone the telling of it until I am rested, and we have had some refreshment? Madame, if you will be so good as to ring, we will ask to be shown to our apartments."

As the door closed behind them, the Squire turned to his wife.

"Did you hear, Caroline? Mabel is dead. You will never see her again! You must never listen for her now, nor expect her to return."

She looked hastily up at him with a startled, hunted expression.

"I do not understand. You mistake, William; it is not Mabel who is dead, but this stranger's mother."

"Yes, yes," he answered, impatiently; "but this stranger's mother was Mabel."

"No—oh, no; that cannot be. Mabel's child is a little baby."

"Can't you—won't you remember that eighteen years have passed since you saw that child? She has grown up into this handsome young girl. How am I to make you understand?" he went on, fretfully.

He always grew angry when his wife was in this mood.

"I do comprehend you quite well, William," she said, speaking slowly and distinctly, enunciating each word clearly. Poor lady, she seemed conscious that she often talked senselessly. "You wish me to know that Mabel is dead. I shall never see her again, you say? Ah, yes! she will visit me in my dreams, and she will tell me that this tall young lady who calls me grandmamma is not her daughter. Did you not see? She is dark and foreign-looking; she has neither Mabel's eyes, hair, nor voice. Oh, I tell you I should know Mabel's child! My daughter's child would be more like herself!"

The Squire turned away impatiently. It seemed hopeless to argue further with his wife. He knew well when she had a settled conviction on any subject it was hard to change it.

"Perhaps we had better go to the dining-room," he said, presently, "and I trust I shall not have to complain of your conduct toward our granddaughter, but that you will receive her with the kindness which she has every reason to expect at your hands. After supper she will give us, I doubt not, the details of her mother's death, and the reason why she has come to us in this unexpected way. I must insist that you do not interrupt her while she is speaking, as you so often are fond of doing with people. If you cannot make up your mind to behave in a proper manner, I shall request that you sup in your own room."

Of course, his poor wife promised anything; she was always submissive when he spoke to her in that way.

In the meantime Christine Vira, and her governess had been shown into a large apartment.

They shuddered involuntarily as they crossed the threshold. There was a musty, moldy scent in the air; the room looked as though it had not been slept in for years.

Christine took the candle from the servant who conducted them, and, holding it high above her head, looked around her. A huge four-post bedstead was at one end of the room, hung with faded chintz, which once, doubtless, blossomed over with brilliant flowers, but which now, alas! showed but little trace of any color; heavy wardrobes, uncomfortable couches, rickety, spindle-legged tables, each more old-fashioned than the other.

She turned to the servant in some dismay.

"Is this the most habitable room you can offer me?" she asked.

"It is almost the best in the house, ma'am,"

answered the woman, indignantly. "Miss Mabel herself was the last to occupy it."

"And that was exactly eighteen years ago," mused Christine.

"Is it possible no one has slept here since?" exclaimed Madame, uplifting her hands and eyes in horror. "You will die of rheumatism, my poor child! And where, then, am I to sleep to-night?" she inquired, in some concern.

"Mr. Grey's room is opposite this, ma'am. The housekeeper thought you could take that until he arrives, and we can then prepare another for you. My master sees so little company that extra rooms are seldom required."

"Yes, of course," interrupted Christine, "we quite understand. If you will have a fire lighted here, and see that the bed is well aired, and light plenty of candles, I shall do very well, I dare say. Who is this Mr. Grey?" she asked, as the servant was about to withdraw.

"My master's nephew," replied the old woman, in a way which showed she was not fond of being questioned.

"Mr. Grey is evidently a constant visitor," said Christine, when they were alone. "I must make a friend of him."

"You will probably make more than a friend of him," replied Madame, "unless he prove very different from other men. But come; we must not waste time talking here. I am dying of hunger, and the antiquated domestic informed me supper would be served in a few minutes."

They shortly after descended to the dining-room, where they found the Squire already seated at the head of the table. Mrs. Caillern was opposite to him, looking nervous and uneasy, starting every time her husband spoke, fearful lest she would do something which should call forth some rebuke from him.

The meal passed almost in silence. Christine was thoughtful and preoccupied, while Madame Veroust was too intent upon satisfying her appetite to trouble much about conversation.

At last the cloth was removed, and the servants left the room. Christine drew her chair nearer her grandfather, and commenced her story.

"I will begin," she said, "at the time when my mother left this house, and, carrying me in her arms, walked through the storm to the station."

"It is hardly necessary," interrupted the Squire, "to revert to that, I think."

"I only mention it," went on Christine, "because that day commenced my father's better fortunes."

"When my mother returned, ill and tired with her journey, and sick at heart with disappointment"—she dwelt upon the words as though determined to spare her grandfather nothing—"she found a lady with my father. She was his sister, who had, a few years before, married a rich English banker, and then resided in London. My father had written to her repeatedly; but she had been from home for some time, and had not received his letters. On her return she at once hastened to the poor lodgings my parents occupied, and, as soon as the invalid could be moved, insisted upon our going to her own house."

"My father, as you know, was an artist, but what money he earned by his paintings was generally spent as soon as received; so, when he fell ill, my poor mother found that, at the end of a few weeks, the little money she had by her was almost exhausted. It was in this emergency she, as a last resource, besought your assistance."

"Tender nursing and good living soon partially restored my father's health; but the doctors insisted that the air of his native country was necessary for his perfect recovery, declaring that a winter in England would be most prejudicial to him."

"We accordingly went to Italy, Mrs. Blount, my aunt, providing my parents with ample means."

"Here my father was soon strong enough to commence his painting again, and his pictures were much sought after."

"No family could be happier and more united than we were. We traveled about all over Italy and the south of France, seldom coming further north than Lyons."

"It was at that city, when I was ten years old, that we first became acquainted with Madame Veroust. She was then but lately a widow. Not being able to afford to keep the large house she had occupied during her husband's lifetime, she was forced to let the greater part of it, and we became her tenants."

"A strong attachment soon sprung up between my mother and her; and her daughter Juliette, a girl about my own age, and I were fast friends."

"Poor mamma had up to this time undertaken my instruction herself; but she was so strong, and, as she disliked my being taught by strangers, it was arranged that Madame should teach me with her own daughter."

"From that time we were inseparable, and when we traveled, Madame let her house be accompanied us."

"Within the last few years my mother's health began to fail, and we resided almost entirely in Lyons, my father having several patrons in that neighborhood."

"Last year he was engaged by a M. Dupont, the proprietor of a fine chateau a few miles from the city, to restore some beautiful paintings which decorated the ceiling of his hall."

"One day, when the work was almost completed, my mother expressed a wish to see it, and arranged that she and I, Madame Veroust and Juliette, should all drive to the chateau. M. Dupont being at that time from home."

"The hall was, indeed, a noble apartment; the floor inlaid with colored marbles; the walls hung with trophies of the chase and armor; but it was the ceiling which attracted most of our admiration. It was extremely large and dome-shaped. The paintings upon it represented a boar-hunt, and were magnificent works of art. My father, as we entered, was in the act of putting the finishing touches to one of the principal figures."

"He stood upon a narrow platform composed of a few planks of wood. My mother shuddered as she beheld the insecurity of his position, and begged him to descend."

"He laughed down at us merrily, saying, 'How glad I am that you did not come when I was at work on the center figures. I had painted them lying on my back. The position was altogether much more perilous. But I will come down to you now if it alarms you to see me here;' and he proceeded to walk along the platform in order to reach a ladder which stood at one end."

"He had gone about half-way when he turned, and looked back at my mother to reassure her. At that moment his foot slipped. He vainly tried to recover his balance. There was a wild, awful shriek. He fell. I saw my mother rush forward, and raise my father's head. It was frightfully disfigured. Never shall I forget the sight. I fainted."

"When I at last came to myself, I found that I had been ill for two days, and learnt that my mother was at the point of death."

"I insisted upon going at once to her bedside; but I was only in time to listen to her dying request, which was that I should go once to England; for she felt sure that you, dear grandparents, would receive me when you knew I was an orphan."

Christine paused, and looked inquiringly at the Squire.

"Yes, my child," he said; "you did right to come. Let us hope we shall make you happy here, and get you in time to forget this frightful tragedy. But you say nothing of your companion, Juliette. How is it, Madame Veroust, that you did not bring her also to England?"

"Ah, monsieur, spare me!" cried Madame, raising a handkerchief to her eyes; "the fate of my poor daughter is even more terrible than that of Christine's parents. My darling Juliette had always been of a very excitable nature. Only to see an animal in pain would make her

quite ill; and often have I known her to faint if I did but cut my finger. Monsieur will readily suppose how great was the shock to this sensitive child when she saw Monsieur Vira, precipitated from that fearful height, fall almost at her feet. Her brain never recovered the shock of that moment. I have been forced to put my beloved Juliette under the care of a medical man. Fortunately for me, my brother-in-law is a doctor, and much experienced in such cases. He undertook to receive my daughter, but strongly advised my not even attempting to see her until he had had charge of her for some time. Ah, monsieur," she added, "you may imagine how bitter it was for me to promise not to see my Juliette; but it is for her good. I would not selfishly consider my own feelings. I therefore devote myself to my other daughter," she said, smiling sadly, and patting Christine's hand, "and hope to find some consolation in being permitted to remain near her."

The telling of Christine's story had occupied some time, and, as it was already late, Madame suggested their retiring.

Mrs. Chiltern was gazing at the dying embers, her hands clasped on her lap; she had occupied the same position all the time her granddaughter was speaking. It is doubtful if she had heard half that was said.

CHAPTER II.

MADAME VEROUST would have entered Christine's room with her, but the young girl wished her good-night at the door.

"I would rather be alone to-night," she said. "I have so much to think of."

She changed her dress for a loose wrapper, and unbound her hair, which fell in heavy, jetty masses far below her waist; then threw herself wearily into a large arm-chair near the fire. Resting her head on her hand, she mused for some time.

Slowly the tears gathered, and taking a pocket which she wore concealed in her bosom, she pressed it wildly again and again to her face. Opening it, she gazed long upon the portrait of a young man; then she swayed back and forth in an agony of grief.

"Auguste, Auguste!" she moaned, "I shall never see you more! Already I begin to regret the step I have taken; but it is too late—too late! I cannot now go back! Do you miss me much, I wonder?" she went on, brushing the tears impatiently away, and pressing the locket more and more to her lips. "Ah, me! those were happy days when we thought only of our love, and forgot that we were poor. Fancy me the wife of a poor man!" she laughed, scornfully. "No, no, Auguste; it was a pleasant dream while it lasted; but I must think no more of you after to-night!"

Saying this, she drew the portrait from the pocket, and, without one more look at it, cast it into the fire. She watched it curl and shrivel in the heat, and at last disappear; then she rose, and walking to the toilet table, looked anxiously at the reflection of herself in the glass.

"I thought I was above such weakness!" she muttered, bitterly, as she saw her tear-stained cheeks. "Bah! I am not like myself to-night; I must be that I am tired." Looking round the room, she shuddered a little involuntarily. "It is lucky I am not afraid of ghosts; this looks the very picture of a haunted room. If spirits did visit this world, surely the last occupant of this chamber would appear to me to-night. How foolish I am! I will hasten to bed, and forget my fancies in sleep."

But it was many hours before Christine closed her eyes. Every sound caused her heart to beat so that she could almost hear it.

The long disused furniture cracked and groaned as the fire died down, and the storm, which still raged outside, shook the windows so violently that Christine thought every moment the casements would be dashed in. At last, worn out by sheer fatigue, she fell into a heavy sleep, and did not wake until it was broad daylight. With the darkness disappeared whatever

gloomy forebodings she might have had the night before, and Christine rose, determined to make the best of her position.

Not many weeks passed before great changes took place at the Manor. The drawing-room, which had been disused for so many years, had the covers taken off its furniture; the piano was tuned, and once more gave forth sweet sounds beneath Christine's supple fingers. The conservatory was robbed of its choicest blossoms, notwithstanding the old gardener's remonstrance, and the vases filled with flowers. A smart lady's-maid arrived from London, who scandalized the staid old servants by her giddy manner and grand dresses.

Christine's bedroom underwent a complete transformation. The old furniture was consigned to an attic, and was replaced by a pretty French bed, dainty dressing-table, modern wardrobes, chairs, and lounges. A room adjoining became a charming little boudoir.

The neighboring gentry called one after the other, and were received by Christine with such dignity and grace that the Squire was more than ever charmed with his granddaughter. He was seldom out of her society; if Christine were bored by him, she had too much tact to show it.

Mrs. Chiltern kept more than ever to her own apartments. She had taken an instinctive and unaccountable dislike to Christine, and by degrees ceased even to take her meals with the others. Her husband, now that he had other things to occupy him, took less pleasure in worrying her, and in the company of her faithful maid Abigail the poor lady suffered much less from the fits of nervousness to which she had been accustomed. She would sometimes walk up and down the terrace with Madame Veroust, but did this more out of politeness to the Frenchwoman than for the sake of any pleasure derived from her society.

"Wilfred Grey will be here this evening," said the Squire one morning, after reading a letter which had just arrived. "He is anxious to make your acquaintance, Christine. I trust you and he will be good friends. He was at one time greatly attached to your mother, but she had the bad taste to refuse him and his ten thousand a-year for that—ahem!—I should say, for your father!"

"He is now no longer young, I conclude?" said Christine.

"Not young!" exclaimed the Squire. "Well, that depends entirely on what you consider young. Wilfred is barely forty, and one of the handsomest men I know."

Christine took some pains with her toilet that evening. She looked dazzlingly beautiful as she entered the drawing-room, clad in a robe of rich ruby silk, with ruffles of costly lace at her neck and wrists. No matter what dress she wore, she always looked as if it were the very one that suited her best.

Mr. Grey was standing near the fire-place, talking to the Squire. Christine could not help smiling a little scornfully to herself at the thought of having taken any pains to please the very ordinary-looking gentleman before her. Surely she would find it not very difficult to captivate this man; and yet, if she were not mistaken, his expression showed more of disappointment than admiration as their eyes met.

She advanced with hand extended, and a smile on her lips, not waiting for the Squire to introduce them.

"We are cousins," she said; "we shall be friends also, I hope."

And soon they were conversing as easily and naturally as if they had known each other for years. Some days passed, and though Christine used all her arts, tried all her fascinations, she felt that Mr. Grey's heart was as safely in his own keeping as ever.

One evening, after dinner, Christine, complaining of the heat of the drawing-room, passed with her cousin into the conservatory, which was adjoining. An arbutalon wound its delicate tendrils round a carved pillar near them. Plucking one of its bell-like flowers, she

offered it to Mr. Grey, with one of her most captivating glances.

He shook his head, and, smiling gravely, said, "I never wear flowers; the practice always seems to me effeminate. There is something so incongruous in the fact of ornamenting the severe and prosaic evening dress of the present day with a flower."

"It never struck me in that light before, but I dare say you are right," said Christine, bending her head, and fastening the flower in her own dress to hide her discomfiture.

As Mr. Grey watched her, his looks fell upon a bracelet which she wore, composed of flat medallions of dead gold. He started as he caught sight of it, and begged to be allowed to examine it nearer.

She unclasped it, and handed to him at once. "I recognize it," he said as he took it from her. "It is one which I myself gave to your mother. It used to contain my likeness."

"Really," exclaimed Christine. "You surprise me. I was not aware there was place for any likeness. Has it any secret spring?"

"Yes; see here!"

As he spoke he touched a spring and one of the medallions opened, disclosing a beautifully-painted miniature of a fair young child, with large expressive eyes and thick clusters of curling golden hair.

For some time neither of them spoke. Wilfred Grey seemed strangely agitated, but Christine was too much occupied in looking at the portrait to observe him.

"Who is this child?" at last he said, in as careless a tone as he could command.

"It is the daughter of Madame Veroust," she answered. "Dear Juliette and I were very much attached to each other. I shall value the bracelet still more now I know that it contains her likeness."

"How strange that you should have known nothing about it!" he said, regarding her fixedly.

"Yes; is it not? I must ask Madame to explain it. She probably gave it to mamma. You see, this was taken when Juliette was quite a child, so it is not astonishing that I should have forgotten the circumstance."

That night Wilfred Grey paced up and down his room in the greatest excitement. He knew not what to think—what to do. The innocent young countenance which had looked out at him from the bracelet was so exactly like what Mabel had been at the same age. The same pleading expression; the clustering curls growing in the same rebellious manner over the low white brow. Surely this could not be the portrait of the daughter of that dark, swarthy-looking Frenchwoman!

And then he remembered how he had heard that Madame Veroust's daughter was insane; even now under the care of some medical man—probably in some private asylum.

His mind was filled with the darkest forebodings; he hardly dared own to himself what he feared. Often had he wondered how it was Christine was so totally unlike her mother; and, indeed, unlike her father, too. He remembered well the weak, handsome Carl Vira, and she in no way resembled him. He seemed to be able to account for everything now; and yet, if his surmises were correct, what ought he to do?

He could not accuse this young girl of being an impostor, just because the face in the portrait was more like what Mabel's daughter should be.

The very idea was preposterous; and still he could not let the matter rest. He shuddered at the thought that perhaps the daughter of his old love was, even now, incarcerated in some foreign asylum, where she might be ill treated; while the girl who had pretended to be her friend for so many years was here filling her place.

Before he went to bed that night Wilfred Grey had resolved that he would himself go to Lyons and hunt up this Doctor Veroust, Madame's brother-in-law. At the last, if he were unable to see the young girl under his charge,

he would, if necessary, call in the aid of the police, but that must be only as a last resource. He was fully aware how important it was to arouse no suspicion until he had proved beyond a doubt that she was indeed Mabel's daughter.

It was rather late when Mr. Grey entered the breakfast-room next morning.

Christine rallied him playfully upon his laziness. She was unusually animated; while Madame, deep in thought, held a pencil in a contemplative way against her lips, as she bent over a sheet of paper which was on the table before her, and on which was a long list of names.

"You are the very person we want," said Christine. "In fact, we cannot get on at all without you. I have a grand piece of news. This morning grandpapa has given his consent to my having a ball on my birthday, and as there is barely a fortnight before that important day, I am anxious to send out the invitations at once."

And what does my aunt say to this arrangement?" asked Wilfred. "It will hardly suit her quiet habits, I think."

Christine made a little move of annoyance.

"Surely it is enough if grandpapa makes no objection? Grandmamma will, of course, keep to her own apartments."

"You seem to have settled it all your own way already," he replied, coldly. "I should have thought"—glancing at the black dress which she wore—"that it would have been advisable to wait a few months."

"My goodness, monsieur!" put in Madame; "would you have the poor child dwell forever on her bereavement? We are only too thankful, M. Chiltern and I, that she endeavors so bravely to find distractions."

An expression of keen contempt for a moment crossed Wilfred's features; fleeting as it had been, Christine noted it, and the hot color rushed to her cheeks. She bit her lips to hide her confusion. She felt that this man despised her, and it piqued her beyond endurance. Why did he see faults in her which no other man had dared to do? She was used to flattery, admiration—adoration, even—and yet from this cool, impassive cousin she had heard no word which showed that he even considered her beautiful. Already, though their acquaintance dated back but a few weeks, he had shown by his manner that he thought her heartless, selfish, and a coquette. Oh! it was humiliating, she thought, to be treated thus by a man old enough to be her father, and one whom most girls would consider plain and uninteresting.

Had Wilfred sought to gain her affections, he could not have gone a better way to work; but this he had no desire to do. Indeed, much as he strove to master it, he had always been conscious of a feeling almost amounting to aversion for his lovely cousin. As may be well imagined, these sentiments were tenfold increased since the discovery of the portrait.

He perceived Christine's annoyance, and had no wish to quarrel with her.

"Will you not give me some breakfast?" he asked, smiling and seating himself at the table. "I see Mary has brought me some fresh tea. May I ask you to pour it out for me? We will talk over this wonderful ball in the meantime. Where is my uncle?"

"Grandpapa rode off to Blexby the moment he had finished his breakfast, to order programmes."

"Ye gods! what a victory!" laughed Wilfred. "Do you mean to say you have so far conquered and subdued the Squire as to get him to run on errands for you? I tremble at what I may be expected to do. What do you require of me, oh, charming, yet despotic, princess?"

"I only wish you to be serious," pouted Christine.

"That is easily done," he said, looking grave immediately. "Is that really all?"

"Oh, of course it is not. You are to tell Madame the names of all the people who are to be invited, in order that she may add them to her list."

"It seems to have reached a gigantic length already," he said, running his eyes over what was written. "I see you have left out the De Veres, the Grants, and the Campbells, to say nothing of Major Sandown, who would bring dancing men from Blexby."

"Oh, of course; how stupid of us!" said Christine, taking a pencil and quickly writing the names mentioned. "I was getting nervous about the scarcity of dancing men. We shall get on finely now you are here to help us. And mind, sir, I shall expect you to dance every time; I will even give you the first waltz as an inducement."

"But I am not at all sure I shall be here."

"Not be here?" echoed Christine. "I thought you were going to stay until next month."

"I fear it will be impossible; I have some important business which must be attended to. I start for town to-morrow."

"Oh, it is too annoying!"

And tears of vexation rose to Christine's eyes. She had hoped great things from this ball; she never looked so well as in a ball-dress, and was determined to wear one that should eclipse all others. Then she danced divinely, and had hoped that even he would on that night succumb to her attractions.

"Could you not return in time?" she asked, eagerly.

"I fear not," responded Wilfred; "but if it be possible, I will do so."

They were interrupted by the entrance of the Squire, who had just returned from his ride. A long consultation was at once commenced as to the desirability of having the ball-room decorated with evergreens and hot-house plants, etc.

The refreshment-room was to be turned into a perfect bower of flowering shrubs and ferns; tiny fountains were to spring out here and there from beds of moss; the whole to be dimly illuminated by Chinese lanterns.

This was entirely Christine's idea.

"Will it not be charming?" she exclaimed. "Just like fairyland!"

"What, with Malpus as presiding king, popping champagne corks, and directing the movements of his satellites as they dispense chicken and other solid food?" remarked Wilfred, laughing.

"Oh, cousin, what shocking ideas you have!" cried she. "I never knew any one so fearfully prosaic; but I will not quarrel with you if only you will promise to return for my birthday."

"Why, Wilfred, you surely are not thinking of leaving us?" asked the Squire.

"I am very sorry, sir, but I fear it cannot be avoided."

"Ah! more trouble with those tiresome lawyers, I suppose. Well, my boy, you must not let them detain you long; Christine, I know, would be greatly disappointed if you were absent from her ball."

Mr. Grey was silent; but he knew well many miles would probably stand between him and Chiltern Manor by that day.

The next morning he was to start early, and thought to leave the house quietly, without disturbing any one; but he found Christine down looking superbly lovely in a soft cashmere wrapper.

"I knew if I did not get up and look after you, you would very likely go away without any breakfast," she said, as she gave him her hand.

"I am afraid I must plead guilty to some such intention," owned Wilfred, smiling.

"And you do not get to London for more than four hours! How thoughtless you men are! Come, you have no time to lose; the carriage will be round in ten minutes."

Mr. Grey felt just a little uncomfortable; he would so greatly have preferred not to see Christine again.

Why would she not quarrel with him, or, better still, ignore him altogether?

It would have made his task so much easier. He hated that she should be so careful of his

welfare, so thoughtful about him, when all the time he was contemplating her destruction.

She remained on the steps as he drove away, her white figure standing out clearly against the dark gray stone.

He sighed as he turned his head away, and for the first time, almost thought of relinquishing his journey; but the remembrance of the pleading, wistful eyes of the miniature of her whom he really believed to be Mabel's daughter once more decided him.

CHAPTER III.

CHRISTINE turned, and, with a sigh, entered the house. She hardly dared own to herself how greatly she should miss her cousin; she was already getting to care for him too much for her peace of mind; she wondered how she could have fancied herself in love with Auguste Le Roy. It was now nearly five months since she had seen him. They had left Lyons so suddenly that she had not even wished him good-by.

Madame had sent a letter to his lodgings to explain; that was all. Yes, that was all; but Christine sighed a little as she thought with what anguish he must have read that letter. She knew too well what it contained, for she had helped Madame to compose it. How each word must have struck him to the heart!

Poor Auguste! she was not so sure, after all, that she did not love him still. The feelings she had for Wilfred Grey were more engendered by pique and vanity than love. It is doubtful if a girl of Christine's ambitious nature could really truly love any man; self love was ever too strong with her.

She had returned to the breakfast-room, and she saw that in her absence the letter-bag had been brought in, and put on the table by the Squire's place. She knew where her grandfather kept the keys; she would open the bag, and see if there were anything for herself; it would help to pass the time until the others descended.

Yes; here was an invitation to dine at Springfield Hall, and here a note from her dressmaker.

But what was this? A foreign letter for Madame, bearing the Lyons post-mark! From whom could it be?

She ran with it to Madame Veroust's room, where she found that lady bullying her maid for some trifling carelessness.

Christine signed to her to dismiss the girl, and as soon as they were alone, produced the letter.

"From whom can it be?" she said. "I thought no one in Lyons knew our address."

Madame took it from her excitedly, and as she saw the writing, gave an exclamation of surprise and annoyance.

"It is from Antoine Veroust! How could he have discovered we are here, and what can he mean by writing?"

"Would it not be as well to open the letter, and see what he says?" responded Christine, impatiently. "He knew the object of our journey to England. You might just as well have confided entirely in him at first. I dare say he discovered all he wanted to know from his patient."

"Ah! of course; that is it! How stupid of me not to have thought of that before!"

Saying which, she tore open the letter, and eagerly read its contents.

"Ah, my child, we are ruined! It is frightful what he asks! He says that he has discovered Mr. Chiltern is enormously rich, and that, doubtless, you have command of large sums of money. He demands—listen to that, demands!—that we send him six hundred pounds a-year for the maintenance of the young lady under his charge. She has already been nearly six months with him, and he requests that three hundred pounds be sent within the next fortnight."

"But I thought he had promised to be satisfied with the two hundred pounds you gave him the night we left, and under no circumstances to ask more."

"Surely you know Antoine better than to put much faith in his word!" said Madame, bitterly. "Oh, what a fool I was to trust him! You know what I wished to do; no one would have been any the wiser. I wish, now, that I had not listened to your foolish harpies!"

"For Heaven's sake, do not talk like that!" said Christine, turning very white, and seizing her companion by the wrist. "Would you have had us stain our souls with—"

"There, take away your hand—you hurt me!" said Madame. "Why excite yourself? Some one will hear us. Let us think what can best be done. How much money have you?"

"Not more than fifty pounds, though I dare say I could easily get grandpa to give me a check for a hundred on the pretext of paying for my ball-dress, but I dare not ask him for more."

"And that would only be half the sum required," sighed the Frenchwoman, hopelessly.

"You must write to him, and say it is impossible for us to send more at present, but that we will endeavor to forward what he asks before the end of the year."

"Ah, I know Antoine; he is determined, merciless."

But, nevertheless, Madame sat down before her desk, and wrote what Christine suggested.

The letter was sent off that same afternoon, and the money inclosed. The Squire raised his eyebrows a little when Christine stated that it was impossible to get anything fit to appear at the ball under a hundred pounds; but, as usual, she had her own way, and the check was signed.

Days passed, and no answer arrived from Doctor Veroust. Christine began to hope that it would trouble them no more for a time, but Madame was still far from easy on the matter.

"His very silence makes me nervous," she said. "Who knows but what he may be even now on his way to England?"

"That is not at all probable," answered Christine. "In the first place, he could not easily leave his patient. Any way, we will not think of without that. To-morrow is my birthday: let me enjoy myself without thinking of disagreeable things."

In the meantime nothing had been heard of Alfred Grey. Up to the last moment Christine thought that he would have returned in time for her ball. She even sent the carriage to the station in the evening, on the chance of his arriving by the last train, and great was her disappointment when it returned empty.

She had never appeared more lovely in her life than she did that night. Her dress, of rich cream-colored satin, almost covered with clouds of delicate lace, was fastened, here and there, with wreaths of deep red roses; a cluster of the same flowers were in her hair. Her ornaments were rubies and diamonds; these the Squire had insisted upon his wife lending, though it was not without some show of resistance that Mrs. Chiltern consented.

The ball was at its height, and Christine, leaning on the arm of her partner, passed into a small drawing-room which opened from the ball-room. She sunk into a chair, with a sigh of relief.

"Do you mind our not dancing this waltz?" asked her companion. "I am a little tired, and the rooms are so warm. We might go on to the balcony for a few minutes—the night is beautifully fine."

"I must not let you take cold, then," said the young man, smiling; and, taking a soft, white shawl, which some one had left on a chair near them, he wrapped it round her shoulders.

"How calm and peaceful!" said Christine, as she gazed on the landscape spread before her. The moon was almost full, and every object in the park was rendered distinct as by day.

"What is that moving there, by the trees? Surely it is a carriage coming along the drive?"

"Yes, it certainly is," said her companion,

looking in the direction she indicated. "Some of your guests arriving rather late."

"That cannot be," she answered; "for all have arrived whom we expected. It must be Mr. Grey, my cousin, but I cannot understand how he can come at this time. Yes, it must be he," she cried, as the carriage drew up near the door, and a gentleman stepped out. She took a rosebud from her bouquet, and, leaning forward, let it fall on his head.

He looked up, and Christine, giving a cry of surprise and alarm, drew herself back into the shade of the window.

Soon she made an excuse for quitting her companion and hastened from the room.

In the hall she met the gentleman who had just arrived. He came forward, and took her hands eagerly.

"How glad am I to see you, dear young lady!" he cried. "And my sister—I hope she is well? I thought I would come and give you both a little surprise."

"Come into this room," she said, trying to speak calmly, to hide the annoyance she felt. "John, let Madame know that Doctor Veroust is here. Then, closing the door, she looked round haughtily at him. "Why have you come? You might naturally guess that your presence would not be welcome here. And your patient—what of her?"

Madame Veroust here burst into the room.

"Is it possible, Antoine, that it is you?" she cried, much excited. "What brings you to England?"

"You do not, either of you, seem very pleased to see me," said their visitor, casting himself into a chair, and, throwing back his head, he laughed out, as though it were the best joke in the world.

"You ask why I am here; I will tell you. First, I discovered your address in England. My interesting young patient had often heard Madame Vira speak of Chiltern Manor, near Blexby, and I guessed it was to the grandparents you would go. Well, I thought it probable that the old gentleman was wealthy. So many English are. I, therefore, sent off the little letter, to which I received an answer just ten days ago. I soon came to the conclusion that a young lady who could send one hundred and fifty pounds by return of post could possibly be made to give much larger sums without much difficulty. To-night I arrived at Blexby. I went to the hotel, had my dinner, entered into conversation with the waiter. From him I hear of M. Chiltern's great wealth, and also of the beautiful granddaughter who has but lately returned from France, and who already rules the Manor, as though the whole place belonged to her. His news charmed me, as you may suppose, and though I had not intended coming on here before the morning, I changed my mind, more especially as I heard there was a ball in honor of Mademoiselle's birthday; so I knew I should find every one up. Besides, I felt sure that so dear a friend as I am would be made welcome at any hour. I, therefore, propose stopping the rest of the night here, and starting for France by an early train to-morrow. But, first, we have a little matter of business to arrange."

Rubbing his hands together gleefully, he gave another unmusical laugh, greatly enjoying the discomfort of his listeners.

Madame had sunk helplessly on a couch, and was sobbing hysterically, behind her handkerchief.

Christine paced the room for a minute or two, without speaking; then turned and faced him like a hunted animal at bay.

"What is it you want of us?" she hissed, through her clenched teeth. "I have already sent you all the money I possess."

"But you will ask the good grandfather for more. I do not expect it to-day, nor to-morrow; I give you a week. Listen! I will be candid with you. I am tired of the quiet, retired life I lead. I have my little ambitions, like Mademoiselle here; in fact, I am about to get married." He sighed and simpered as he

spoke, like a school girl. "My betrothed is fond of gayety, and wishes to live in Paris. Of course, I desire to please her in all that is in my power; but Paris is expensive—very expensive! You will, therefore, easily comprehend that I shall require rather a large sum upon which to begin housekeeping. To whom can I turn under such circumstances but to my dear friends here in England?"

"How much do you ask?" interrupted Christine, fiercely.

"Just one little thousand pounds."

"It is impossible! I could as soon get you ten thousand pounds."

"Really, then, ten thousand pounds be it!" murmured their visitor, resignedly.

"And he jokes about it!" exclaimed Madame, through her sobs.

"See here!" said Christine. "It may be—nay, it is almost certain—that I shall not succeed in getting this thousand pounds. Suppose I cannot do so?"

"No, no!" he said, softly. "We will not suppose anything that would lead to such serious consequences. You have your rings, your laces, your jewels," he went on, looking at her with the eye of a connoisseur. "In a word, you have a rich and loving grandfather, who refuses you nothing. I feel sure that you will get over this little difficulty. I shall not require the money for a whole week. It is then that my marriage takes place."

"And your patient," asked Madame—"what is to become of her if you go to Paris?"

"She is delicate, poor child! The close confinement to which I have been compelled to subject her has affected her health. It may be that she will succumb." As he spoke, he looked up to the ceiling, and sighed heavily. "Should such be the case, I could, of course, make no further calls upon your generosity."

Christine sprung forward with a cry, and seizing his arm, looked wildly at him.

"I understand you!" she cried. "You mean that she shall die? Oh, to what has my ambition led? Say—tell me the truth!—would you kill her?"

He smiled down upon her, calmly.

"You make use of such unpleasant terms!" Then pushing her from him roughly, and rising to his feet, he said, haughtily, "Even if I contemplated what you say, why should it shock you? I tell you the life you have condemned her to is worse than a hundred deaths."

"Wretch! What have you done to her?" asked Christine.

He shrugged his shoulders deprecatingly.

"My house, like all others where insane persons are confined, is, as you may be aware, visited at stated periods by inspectors. Now, of course, it would have been particularly awkward if a sane patient had been found with me. I, therefore, was under the painful necessity of taking means so to affect the brain, that—"

"Monster, say no more! Oh, this is frightful!" And Christine sunk, half-fainting, into a chair.

"I was about to say, my charming young lady, when you so rudely interrupted me, that your little friend, for whom you seem to feel such sudden sympathy, is now perfectly insane—in fact, one of my most hopeless subjects."

When Madame descended the next morning, she found, to her inexpressible relief, that their visitor had already departed. She hastened to Christine's room to inform her of the fact.

The young girl was in a nervous and excited state, and had evidently had no sleep.

"That is well," she exclaimed, when she heard, "I am at least spared the fate of seeing him again! About this money,"—speaking fast, and pressing her hand to her heated brow—"I have a plan, a fearful, a dangerous one, but still a means by which to obtain it."

"I knew you would," exclaimed Madame, looking at her admiringly; "and, perhaps, it will be the last sum that will be required of us. How clever you are! Tell me your scheme."

"It is this: Grandpapa keeps his check-

book in the little secrétaire which stands near the window in his study. I must manage to tear a leaf out of it, and make out a check to myself for the sum asked."

"But it would be at once seen that it was not in his handwriting, and suspicions would be aroused; besides, surely, in any case it would soon be discovered."

"I think not. I have heard, Mr. Wilson, the lawyer, complain of the Squire's great carelessness about money matters. I believe he keeps no sort of account of the money he spends in the year; and, as regards the handwriting, see here."

Christine went to a table, on which stood her desk. Unlocking it, she took out several sheets of paper, written closely in a small cramped hand.

The same sentence occurred on them over and over again,—"Pay Miss Vira £1,000—one thousand pounds."

This was how Christine had passed the few hours since the departure of her guests.

Madame Veroust could not suppress a cry of exultation as she looked.

"And this is your doing? It is wonderful; no one could tell it from the Squire's own writing."

As soon as breakfast was over, Christine said she wished to drive into Blexby with Madame Veroust.

"I won't ask you to come with us, grand-papa," she said to the Squire, "for we are going to do some tiresome shopping, and I know how you dislike being kept waiting outside. I wish, by the by, if you do not mind, that you would walk round to the stables, and look at Lightfoot. The last time I drove her it struck me she went a shade lame. I spoke to Thomas about it, and he could see nothing wrong. Perhaps it is only fancy; but I should feel more satisfied if you looked at her yourself."

The Squire, fearful lest anything should have happened to the beautiful mare, at once hurried off to the stables; and Christine, knowing he would stay fussing about there for some time, made the best of the opportunity. Signing to Madame to follow, she made her way to the study.

The keys were in the secrétaire, where the Squire often left them. Even if they had not been, they could easily have been found.

Being heavy, her grandfather never carried them in his pocket, but kept them in a small table drawer in the same room.

It was but the work of an instant to find the check-book, and abstract a page. Then they both hastened from the study with beating hearts.

An hour later they were driving along the road to Blexby.

"I shall cash the check at once," said Christine; "my mind will be easier when it is done."

"How calm you are!" remarked Madame, nervously. "I tremble like a leaf."

"It is lucky, then," Christine answered, "that I am able to act for both of us."

At that moment she pulled up before the bank; and, descending lightly, entered it with a firm step.

There were a few minutes of awful suspense to Madame; then she saw the young girl return, and knew by Christine's look that all was well. On the way home no word was said on the subject. Madame could not speak without betraying her excitement, and they had to be cautious, lest the servant behind them should notice that something unusual was going on.

The next day the money was sent to Doctor Veroust, and Christine hoped that, at any rate, for a time, she should be at peace.

CHAPTER IV.

WILFRED GREY was quite right when he surmised that it was the daughter of Mabel Vira, and not of Madame Veroust, who was confined in Doctor Veroust's asylum. The real Christine, on the day of the frightful accident which happened to her father, was brought

home in a swoon, and for some time her life was despaired of.

Madame Vira only survived her husband three days. Juliette also suffered from the severe shock to her nerves, but it was not long before she was able to assist her mother to nurse the invalid.

A few nights after Madame Vira's death, Madame Veroust and her daughter sat whispering together in Christine's room.

"Let us hope," Madame was saying, "that we shall find sufficient money to pay for the funeral. We must have it as quiet and inexpensive as possible. Do you know, Juliette, where Madame Vira kept the money? It was she who always took charge of what there was. I have often heard her say her husband was too careless to take care of it."

"I believe," answered her daughter, "that there is some in the little desk in her room. Perhaps I had better go and see."

Saying which, she went out, and soon returned with the desk in her hands.

Unlocking it, they soon found what they sought. There were two hundred pounds in notes and gold.

"Not so bad," muttered Madame. I am surprised there is so much. But what is to become of Christine? It is impossible that I can keep her for nothing. Out of this two hundred pounds I am already owed fifty pounds for rent."

"Had not Madame Vira rich parents living in England?" asked Juliette.

"Yes; but they were not on friendly terms. I believe they quarreled at the time of her marriage."

"That may be, but they might be willing to receive the granddaughter, especially now she is an orphan. Supposing we look over these papers; we may find out something from them. Ah, yes; I thought so; here is Madame Vira's diary. Now we shall soon know all we wish."

As Juliette spoke, she took up a little red leather book, and on opening it a photograph of Chiltern Manor fell out from between the leaves.

"What a noble-looking place!" Madame cried, as she picked it up, and examined it carefully. "This is, doubtless, the residence of the grandparents. Christine is lucky in having them to go to."

Juliette paid little attention to her mother. She was already busily engaged in reading the diary. Presently she looked up thoughtfully.

"Did not Doctor Veroust say that it is possible Christine may not recover from this illness? In that case, an idea strikes me."

"I hope it is something by which we can make some money," sighed Madame. "The death of our friends will make a great difference to us."

"I see by this diary," went on Juliette, "that Madame Vira's parents have never seen their granddaughter, and that their daughter never wrote to them since she left England, therefore they can have no idea what she is like. Now, what I propose is this: that, if Christine should die, I go to Chiltern Manor, instead of her. The grandparents must be old people, and probably I should inherit the property."

"Ah! my child," cried Madame Veroust, throwing her arms round her daughter, "I should be glad indeed to see you the mistress of so fine a place; but I would not let you go to England without me. You would not wish to leave me, Juliette?" she said, plaintively.

"Of course not, mother; you would accompany me as my valued friend and governess. But it is quite possible that Christine may recover; in that case, it is she who will be the future mistress of Chiltern Manor, and not I."

"Juliette," said her mother, "it must not be; now that I see such wealth within our reach, I cannot bear the thought of relinquishing it. Christine's life hangs but by a feeble thread. One little overdose of this medicine, even a little less care in nursing her, and she never recovers."

"No, no, mother!" and Juliette shuddered;

"anything but that. I have a better plan. My uncle, in consideration of a sum of money, would take charge of her. She would be as much lost to the world in his asylum as though she were dead!"

"But there is another difficulty," interrupted her mother. "If we left Lyons, Auguste Le Roy would follow us; I know him. As future mistress of Chiltern Manor, I should not care to marry a common clerk."

Juliette thought for a moment.

"Stay," she said; "there is one way in which everything could be arranged. He has not seen me since that accident; he knows that I received a great shock—that I was ill. You must tell him that it has affected my brain and that, for a time, you intend to place me under the care of Doctor Veroust."

"But he will come here, and insist upon seeing you?"

"Well, then, you must write to him, and not post the letter until the day we leave."

A feeble cry from Christine interrupted their conversation, and Juliette instantly crossed the room to see what she wanted.

"You are better, dear?" she said, as she held a cup, containing some cooling drink, to the parched lips of the invalid.

"Yes, I am much better now," sighed Christine; "but, if it were not wicked, I should wish that I had died with dear mamma. It seems ungrateful to say so, I know, with you and Madame so good to me; without you two I should have no friend in the world."

Juliette's conscience must have smitten her as Christine spoke.

Day by day the invalid grew stronger, and at the end of a fortnight Doctor Veroust pronounced her well enough to be removed to her house.

Auguste Le Roy had called several times, hoping to see Juliette, but her mother insisted that the girl was too unwell to see any one; and each time he left the house sad and disappointed.

It was arranged that Madame Veroust and Juliette, the latter closely veiled, should leave Lyons by the night train; and that a few minutes before their departure, Doctor Veroust, having previously given her a powerful narcotic, should bring a close carriage for Christine.

She was carried from the house in an unconscious state, wrapped up entirely in a thick shawl. On the way to the station Madame posted a letter to Auguste Le Roy, telling him of the fearful malady which had overtaken her daughter, and saying that she was too much overcome with grief to be able to see him before her departure.

When Christine recovered consciousness she was surprised to find herself reclining in a carriage, opposite Doctor Veroust.

"Where am I?" she cried, looking around in much alarm—"and where are you taking me?"

"Do not distress yourself, my dear young lady. I am taking you home."

"Home!" echoed Christine. "Do you mean my grandparents? It is there mamma, before she died, made me promise I would go."

The doctor was interested, and soon, as we have recorded, found out Squire Chiltern's name and address, which he at once entered in his note-book. Then looking up with a smile, he said, in a soothing way, "Why will you persist in keeping to this absurd idea—why mistake your own identity? You have no grandparents that I ever heard of; and your mother, Madame Veroust, is still alive."

"Madame Veroust my mother!" cried Christine. "Is it possible that you take me for Juliette in this half-light?"

"There, there; do not excite yourself, or you will be ill again! M. Vira's terrible death had such an effect upon your brain that, ever since that time, you have been haunted by strange fancies, the strangest of all being that you imagine yourself to be his daughter, and persist in calling Christine Juliette."

For a time Christine was stunned. She knew not what to think. She had always disliked

and mistrusted this man, and felt that he had some sinister motive in speaking as he did. She saw also by his manner that he did not believe what he said.

Feeling it would be useless to argue with him, she asked presently, in as calm a tone as she could command, "Where are Madame Veroust and my friend?"

"My sister-in-law is accompanying Christine to England, where she is going to join her grandparents."

Christine could not restrain a cry. She saw it all now; they were pretending she was mad, in order to send her out of the way, and Juliette had gone to usurp her place.

"Tell me," she said, looking at him wildly, "where are you taking me? Say, is it to your house—to the asylum for mad people?"

Before he could prevent her, she dashed her hand through the window, and shrieked for help.

The next moment she was lying helpless at the bottom of the carriage, with the doctor's handkerchief tied tightly over her mouth.

"There!" he said, leaning back complacently in his seat. "Why will you compel me to use such harsh measures? Luckily we're in a quiet road, where there are few people likely to be walking at this hour; but I may as well warn you that a second show of such violence will necessitate my putting you in a strait-waistcoat upon our arrival."

Poor Christine! It is impossible to describe the agony of mind she endured during that drive.

She felt that she was entirely at the mercy of this man. She thought for a time that she really would become the maniac he affected to believe her; but before the carriage stopped she reviewed her position more calmly.

No, she told herself, she would not go mad; she would not go mad, and thus play into her enemy's hands; she would let nothing he could say excite or annoy her, but she would make it apparent to the keepers and servants that she was sane. Perhaps, too, one of them might befriend her, and in time help her to escape. Under no circumstances would she despair.

Hardly had she come to this conclusion, when the carriage came to a standstill before a large, dreary-looking house.

The doctor put his head out of the window.

"Here, Jean! Guillaume! one of you, come here! I may require your assistance!"

Two rough looking men ran forward in answer to his summons. He then raised Christine with no gentle hand, and, taking her in his arms, carried her into the house. If he had calculated that she would resent this, and make some resistance, he was disappointed, for Christine lay perfectly still, never moving a limb.

"Ah!" said the doctor; "she is quieter now, and time, too. I had to gag her, as you see, and she has driven her hand through the carriage-window."

A severe cut on Christine's wrist bore testimony to his words.

How bitterly she regretted this rash act of hers, now that she saw how it could be used against her! At any rate, it served as a lesson to show how careful she must be for the future.

"Where is Madame Roux?" said Doctor Veroust. "I left orders that she should be ready to receive this young lady as soon as we arrived. Ah! there you are!" he exclaimed, as a tall, masculine looking woman came from an adjoining room. "Here is your patient, Madame Roux. I shall place her immediately under your care. She will, doubtless, give you some trouble; but you can always call me if she is more than usually violent."

Madame Roux smiled grimly as she cast a contemptuous glance over Christine's slight and delicate figure.

"I think I shall be a match for her, sir, let her be as wild as she please. Come, young lady, follow me!"

And, mounting a flight of broad stairs, she proceeded along a corridor, from which many doors opened on either side, numbered like those in a hotel.

Stopping before one, she selected a key, which was attached with many others to a cord round her waist, and, unlocking it, they entered a barely furnished apartment, with white-washed walls and a small window, placed so high that it was impossible to look out of it, and heavily barred.

"Well, mademoiselle," said the woman, "how do you like your quarters? You see, we waste no thought on little luxuries. Just a chair and a table; your bed, too, is hard and healthy. Sit down on it while I relieve you of the handkerchief with which Monsieur has so affectionately protected you from the cold. Ah! he is a good gentleman; but apt to be a little determined if the inmates are unruly."

Christine felt that any attempt to win over this woman would be futile; she, therefore, remained perfectly silent, though the gag was now removed. Her wrist gave her great pain, though, and she presently asked quietly if she could have it bathed and bound up.

"Oh, I have no time to waste on such trifles," was the answer, "but my daughter will be up presently with some coffee Monsieur has ordered for you. I will tell her to look to it."

Christine's heart beat with hope at the mention of a daughter; a younger woman would perhaps not be so hard, so heartless.

For some minutes she was left alone, but she had heard the key turned in the lock as Madame Roux departed. She sighed as she saw how hopeless any attempt at escape would be, and shivered with cold as she sat dejectedly on the edge of the little bed. There was no fireplace in the room, and her teeth chattered incessantly; her limbs, too, were cramped and aching, but she was brave at heart, though her body might be weak, and determined that she would not despair.

At last steps sounded in the passage, her door opened, and a young woman entered bearing a tray, on which were coffee and a small roll.

How eagerly Christine gazed at her; how anxiously searched for any signs of kindness or sympathy! But the features on which she looked were utterly devoid of expression of any kind.

She did not even look up as she placed the tray on the table, and would have left without a word, but Christine detained her.

"Your mother said you would bind up my wrist for me; will you not do so?"

The girl looked up now, at the unusual softness of the voice, and gazed for some moments on Christine; but made no further sign to show that she had heard. Going out of the room, she relocked it behind her.

In less than five minutes, however, she returned with a basin of warm water and some soft linen rag, and proceeded so gently to bathe the wounded wrist, that Christine ventured to address her once more; but before she had said three words the girl interrupted her.

"It is no use your talking to me," she said bluntly, "for I am not allowed to speak to any of the patients. You had best take your coffee when it is hot, for you seem a poor weak thing enough."

Then, seeing that Christine's hand shook so that she could not help herself, she took the coffee-pot roughly from her, and poured out a cupful.

"There, take that down quickly; you shake so that I cannot bind up your wrist. How cold you are! I never felt such icy hands. You had best get into bed to warm you. I shall catch it if my mother hears me talking."

"Stay one moment," said Christine. "Do you really think that I am mad?"

"Mad! why of course you are, and most likely when you think you aren't, it's just when you are maddest; that is the way with you all. But I can't stay here talking. Your gas will be out directly."

There was a tiny jet of light fixed high up on the wall; Christine had not been alone many moments before it began to grow less and less, and then died away. She made her way, as best she could, to bed in the dark, though it

was hard work undressing with one hand, and she found it impossible to use the other.

Wearied out in body and mind, she soon fell asleep, and, for a time, forgot the troubles which seemed to overwhelm her.

She awoke with a start and a strange feeling of terror upon her; her heart beat so that she could distinctly hear its pulsations. There was no ray of light in the room, and Christine sought in vain to pierce the impenetrable darkness.

Sleep was banished for the rest of the night, and the poor girl fixed her eyes on the little barred window, longing for dawn, yet dreading the commencement of another day.

The first gray streaks of morning soon began to appear. Then she heard the twitter of a robin. Oh, how she envied it its freedom!

Before long, people were moving about the house; then there were hurried steps overhead. A voice called out shrilly for Madame Roux, and Christine wondered what was the matter.

Suddenly she remembered the sounds she had heard in the night, and she looked up at the ceiling.

Her eyes remained there fascinated. What was that dark stain, looking almost black in the imperfect light? Her eyes fell from the ceiling to the floor, and what she saw there caused her heart to stand still with horror; then, with a half-stifled cry, she buried her face in the pillows. Only too well had she discovered what was the stain on the ceiling. Oh, what was this fearful house to which she had been brought? What were the dark deeds which went on beneath its roof?

The door opened, and Madame Roux entered.

"Ah!" she exclaimed; "here is nice work!—as though there were not enough to do up-stairs already. Come, young lady," she went on, as she caught sight of Christine's shrinking figure; "get up and dress yourself; breakfast will be here directly. If you had seen No. 40 up there when we found him dead, just now, you might have shivered a little, and small blame."

"Had some one killed him?" Christine asked, in a whisper.

"Hear that, now? A good joke, indeed! No. 40 killed himself. Monsieur has received no money for him this last eighteen months; he's well rid of him, I'm thinking."

Christine could not help wondering if poor No. 40 would not have been taken better care of if the money had been regularly paid.

Madame Roux led the way to a room opposite.

This room, though simple in the extreme, and plainly furnished, was luxurious compared to her own.

It was lighted, not by a small barred loophole, but by a good-sized window, which looked out onto a pleasant garden. A few pots of flowers stood on the window-sill, and several colored prints adorned the walls.

"Hi, Marie!" called the woman. "Come here and see to No. 6, while I go and look after Jean. You can bring the soup and the rest with you."

And hurrying off as soon as her daughter entered, she shouted to Jean to come down.

Marie looked gloomier and more stolid than on the evening before. She placed the basin of broth with a huge piece of bread before Christine, and then, half turning her back upon her, took up a piece of work and began to sew away diligently.

"I wish you would give me some work to do," said Christine, after a long interval of silence; "the day will be so long to me if I have nothing to do."

"Against orders," snapped out Marie. "I have already seen Monsieur, and he insisted you were to have no exercise, do nothing, speak to no one."

Was Christine mistaken, or did she really hear the last words spoken almost with a sob?

She turned round, and though Marie bent low over her work, she saw something very like a tear on her cheek.

"Marie," Christine said, going over to her and taking one of the hard brown hands in

hers, "you are sorry for me; I can see that you are. I believe you know that I am not mad as they pretend."

"Not I," answered Marie, jerking her hand away. "Who should know better than Doctor Veroust? He says you are mad. Anyway, if you stay in that room from month's end to month's end, without anything to do, and only the bare walls to look at, and never go out in the open air, I know one thing, if you aren't mad now, you very soon will be."

Christine recoiled, shuddering.

"Is that why I am doomed to such close confinement and such idleness?" she asked.

Marie shrugged her shoulders and continued her work without replying.

"Here comes my mother," she said, "so I can be off!"

And, rising, she took up the tray and left the room. As she did so, she let something fall.

Christine sprung forward, and, picking it up, put it quickly into her pocket.

It was a small ball of worsted, in which were stuck a couple of knitting needles. Was it by accident that it had been dropped? Christine felt that it was not, and already began to look upon Marie as a friend. When she returned to her own room, she found it had been swept and tidied up a little.

Days, weeks, months, even, passed, dragging out their weary lengths, and yet Christine had not given up all hope of one day effecting her escape, but bore up bravely under her confinement.

She portioned out the day into equal parts, taking regular exercise up and down her room every morning and evening; then, for a time, she knitted, undoing her work in order to begin again as soon as the ball of worsted was finished.

She discovered that by placing her chair upon the table she could reach the little window, and from it she could see the trees and the fields, and even the white road leading to Lyons. It was this last she loved most to watch.

Sometimes a peasant would pass with a heavy load of wood, drawn by a yoke of sturdy oxen, or a woman driving her cows to pasture. Sometimes Doctor Veroust himself would drive along on his way to town, little thinking that his patient was watching him.

He had only visited her twice since her arrival, and each time seemed surprised to find her in such good health. On his last visit, after feeling her pulse, and asking a few questions, he turned to Madame Roux, who was present, and asked, "Have my orders been strictly attended to? Do neither you nor your daughter hold any conversation with this patient? She, of course, has not been allowed to employ herself in any way?"

"Of course not, sir," answered the woman, meekly. "No one comes near her but Marie and myself, and you know you can depend upon us for doing what you say."

"I must have recourse to some other treatment," he mused. "The young lady is certainly not quite what I should wish to see her. The inspector will be calling here before long, and I hope to see a great change in her by the time he comes."

He spoke cheerfully, as though he were only anxious that Christine should appear in better health; but she felt sure that he intended to try some other and more sure means by which to deprive her of her reason.

Marie, that evening, she found her nervous and excited, with flushed cheeks, dreading what new ordeal she was to pass through.

Marie held up her hand as a sign for silence; then said, gruffly, "I have brought you some medicine; drink it down and make no fuss; I have no time to waste on you!"

And, to Christine's astonishment, she placed the chair on the table, and, mounting it, opened the window, and, passing her hand through the bars, emptied the contents of the glass into the garden below; then, stepping down more lightly than one would have thought possible, she

placed her mouth close to Christine's ear, and whispered, hurriedly, "Do not speak; my mother is in my room, and the doors are open." Then she continued out loud, "So you have swallowed it at last; and time, too! I thought you would never have done sipping and smelling. I shall not bring you your coffee for an hour later to-night, so you will have time to get an appetite."

Christine wondered much what all this could mean, and anxiously looked forward to Marie's second visit, hoping then to hear some explanation.

"Did Doctor Veroust mean to poison her?" she asked herself. "If so, would it be safe to eat or drink anything that was placed before her? As well, though, die of poison as of starvation!"

It was so long before Marie came, that she had almost given up all hope of seeing her again that night. At last the door opened, and she entered, closing it behind her.

Putting down her tray, she seated herself on the edge of the little bed, and regarded Christine intently.

"Are you brave?" she asked. "Can you hear quietly what I have to tell you? Could you see fearful visions, have specters appear to you, and yet not go mad?"

"Oh! what do you mean?" cried Christine, excitedly.

"Listen, and I will tell you. I have waited before coming to you until I was sure my mother was safely out of the way. Doctor Veroust is busy at the other end of the house. You saw me throw away the medicine which was intended for you; if you had drank it you would now be suffering from a severe headache, and I would be far more excited than you are at present. It is, supposing you to be in this nervous state, that Doctor Veroust now contemplates giving your brain such a severe shock by causing sudden and awful fright, that he calculates your reason will at last give way."

"Oh, Heaven, give me strength!" cried the poor girl, folding her arms on the table before her, and letting her head fall on them. "How weak, how helpless I am in the power of this man!"

"Do not give way," said Marie, laying her hand on her shoulder. "Am I not here to help you?"

"Dear Marie, I am not ungrateful, believe me. See, I will be brave;" and she tried to smile through her tears. "Tell me all you know, I beseech you. What will this be like, and when will it appear to me?"

"Between twelve and one o'clock to night. It is intended that you should be startled out of a restless and feverish sleep by seeing a tall figure standing by your bedside. It will be clothed in white, and chains will rattle at each movement. Through its cavernous eyes will shine a pale blue flame. It will hold a naked sword in one hand, while with the other it tries the edge of the blade. The moon which is full to-night, will render the whole still more ghastly by the feeble rays which will penetrate your window."

Christine shuddered. She felt that, had so fearful an object appeared before her unexpectedly, and without any warning, she would, indeed, have lost her reason.

Throwing herself on Marie's neck, she embraced her.

"Oh, Marie, you have saved me from worse than death! What would have become of me if you had not proved my friend? I thought you cold and harsh at first; now I know how good, how kind you are!"

Marie gently put the young girl from her.

"Do not call me good," she said. "I am wicked—ah, you do not know how wicked! You would not call me your friend if you knew all. Listen to me. This tyrant—the man who has caused you so much misery—Doctor Veroust—I loved him—loved him so that I was ready to lose body and soul to please him. And he accepted the sacrifice. I have seen most fearful things done

under this roof; I have even assisted him. What cared I so that I won his approbation? I was even happy; for I believed he loved me. Blind fool that I was! Only two days ago he told me he was about to be married. The news sent a chill to my heart. I had felt that some day it might come, but was not prepared for what followed. He said he intended giving up the asylum, and going to live in Paris. 'And I?' I asked, as calmly as I could—'what is to become of me? You will not leave me behind?' He laughed contemptuously. 'I think my wife would be likely to object to your accompanying us. No,' he said; 'you must stay here with your mother. I am even willing to make you some small allowance, so that you shall never want.' I threw myself on my knees before him; I wept—implored only to be his servant, to see him sometimes; but he would not listen to me. He grew angry at last, when he found how persistent I was, and told me he had long ceased to care for me, that my presence even now was repulsive to him, and, pushing me roughly from him, left me. Then my mother came to me, and begged me to listen to reason. She said if only I would be sensible, the doctor had promised to allow me five hundred francs a year, and also to stipulate that the next proprietor of the asylum should keep on her and me at a good salary. At last I allowed my mother to suppose she had persuaded me, and in the evening sought Doctor Veroust, and asking his pardon for my ill-humor, said that I agreed to accept his terms; and even told him that, after all, I believed I should have been sorry to leave my mother and Lyons. So well did I deceive him, that he patted me on the back, well pleased, saying, kindly, 'Now you are a sensible girl, and yourself again. To show my confidence in you, I will even ask you to assist me in a little masquerade which I am contemplating.' And then he told me of the diabolical plan by which he intended to deprive you of your reason. I complimented him on his cleverness, and myself undertook to personate the specter. It was simple enough. A chemical preparation which burns with a blue flame is to be put within a skull. This is to be fastened above my head. A large sheet will entirely envelope me, and chains will be attached to my wrists."

"Then it will be only you, after all?" smiled Christine; "and I shall not be at all alarmed."

"Oh, but you must," answered Marie; "or, rather, you must feign alarm. Do you not see, if Monsieur supposes that this trick fails, he will concoct something still more fearful, and perhaps next time I may not be so fortunate as to be informed of it. This is what you must do. Instantly upon seeing me, you must utter piercing shrieks, for Doctor Veroust and my mother will both be within hearing; then, after a time, you must pretend to become unconscious. No one will approach you again before morning, when Doctor Veroust will come to see the effect which the fright has had upon you. He has no doubt that, having been already rendered in such a nervous state by the medicine, he will find you insane. You must not undeceive him."

"What, then, am I to do? Will he not soon perceive that I have not suffered from the shock?"

"Let us hope not," replied Marie. "You must feign madness."

"But how?" asked Christine, hopelessly. "I have never even seen a mad person."

"Do and say anything that is outrageous; laugh when you should weep; talk senselessly; sing, dance—do anything. He will be ready to believe, for he will not doubt but that you are really mad."

"Oh, Marie, how is it possible that you can love this wicked man?"

"Love him?" cried Marie, excitedly. "Love him, did you say? I tell you I hate him, and with so fierce a hate that, were he dying at my feet, I would not extend a finger to save him. No; I would jeer at his agonies—would laugh at his torture. You have never known what it is to love as I loved, and then to be repulsed

with scorn! Hark!" she said, growing calmer on the instant; "I hear my mother's step. I must hasten away."

At the door she met Madame Roux, who inquired softly after No. 6.

"Oh, she will do well enough, mother. You had best not disturb her again. She is feverish and excited, and suffering much from her head. Nothing could be better for our little masquerade to-night!"

Her mother chuckled at the idea, and soon Christine heard their retreating steps going along the corridor.

CHAPTER V.

No thought of sleep entered Christine's mind that night. She had already heard the little clock in Marie's room strike twelve, and waited in breathless suspense.

It seemed to her that almost an hour had passed, when there was a sound of stealthy footsteps near her door; the key was turned, there was a clanking as of chains, and by the faint light of the moon she saw a tall, white figure enter, and approach her bed.

Although she had been well prepared, she could scarce repress a cry at the sight of the awful apparition, and involuntarily shrunk against the wall.

Never had she seen anything so ghastly, so unearthly.

Instantly the white garment was parted from under the bony chin, and Marie's face looked out.

"Take courage," she said. "Remember it is but I who am near you. Do not scream until after I speak."

Then the face was again covered, and in a deep and stern voice came the words, "Awake, and meet your doom!" followed by the whisper, "Cry out now as loud as you can!"

And Christine made the house echo again with heartrending shrieks.

She sprung out of bed as though to escape the monster; but it pursued her, and, with a cry more wild than all the rest, she fell to the ground, apparently in a faint.

"It is all right," called out Marie; "she has swooned."

"Not dead, I hope," said Doctor Veroust, coming forward, followed by Madame Roux. "I do not wish that, if it can be avoided."

"No, no," answered Marie. "She lives; I can detect a feeble flutter at the heart."

"Then come away quickly," said the doctor. "I wish her to be alone when she recovers; and, if I mistake not, the inspector will find her mad enough when he pays us his next visit."

In a few moments Christine was alone again, and, soon growing calmer in her mind, she composed herself to sleep, knowing that she would have need of all her strength on the morrow.

Long and soundly she slept. In fancy she was a child again and free, walking through green fields, hand-in-hand with her mother, and she stepped along so lightly, that she scarce bruised the grass beneath her feet. She was enjoying the fresh perfume of the flowers, and the song of birds filled the air. Her heart seemed full of happiness, and she awoke with a smile upon her lips.

Marie stood beside her.

"Ah, mademoiselle, how imprudent!" she exclaimed, as Christine opened her eyes. "What, think you, would my mother have thought had she been the first to enter your room? I ought to have found you wandering aimlessly about, crooning a song or muttering disjointed sentences; and here you are, looking calm and having had a refreshing sleep. Do you not know that the insane sleep but little?"

Christine looked up brightly.

"I do not know how it is, Marie, but to-day I feel full of hope. Have I not reason, now that you have proved yourself so devotedly my friend? Oh, how much stronger I am now that there are two of us to plot together against Doctor Veroust! You shall see how well I will

play my part to-day. But, Marie," she went on, eagerly, "you will do still more for me, will you not? You will help me to escape from this house? We might leave it together, you and I."

"It is impossible," said Marie, moodily. "I dare not. Besides, what would become of my mother? If you escaped she would be blamed, perhaps dismissed, and would then find herself without any means of support. No, we must not think of running away, but I will befriend you, nevertheless."

"How," asked Christine, sadly, "if you can not hold out any hope of my leaving this hateful house?"

"I did not say that; I only told you that you must not run away. But it is quite possible your friends, when informed that you are here, will come and fetch you."

"I understand. You mean that I should write to them; that you will find means of posting a letter for me; but you do not know how unfortunate I am."

And in a few words she told Marie her story.

"You see," she concluded, "if I wrote to my grandparents, they may by this time be much attached to Juliette; it would be difficult for them to believe her an impostor, and they would not readily credit what I said. Juliette is so clever, that if she found out I had written, she would soon inform Doctor Veroust of it, and who knows what fate would await me?"

"But, surely," interrupted Marie, "there is some one else to whom you might apply?"

"I can think of no one. We made so few friends, moving about as we did from place to place. There is M. Le Roy, but he and Juliette are engaged to each other, and he would perhaps be against me. Ah! yes, there is some one, though," she exclaimed, eagerly.

"I had forgotten. I have an aunt in England; my father's sister. She is good and kind; I remember her well. She once visited us in Rome when I was quite a child, but I believe she has not left England since her husband died, which was nearly eight years ago; so, though she occasionally wrote to my mother, I have not since seen her. I feel sure that she would do all in her power to rescue me."

"That is well, then; it is to her you must write. I will, if possible, bring you ink and paper to-morrow. Hush! here comes the doctor! Laugh—scream—do something! My word! you look as mild as a kitten. At least get out of bed, and pull your hair over your eyes!" she went on, imploringly.

When Doctor Veroust entered, Christine was seated on the boards, her hair falling over her shoulders in the greatest disorder. She was nursing her pillow like a doll, and singing softly to it.

The doctor looked at Marie with a meaning smile, and she nodded back at him.

"You see how it is, monsieur; I can do nothing with her. Here is half an hour and more that I have been trying to get her to take her breakfast."

"Never mind the breakfast; she will take it when she is hungry."

Going up to Christine, he placed his hand on her head and made her look up. It was a trying moment, but she avoided meeting his gaze by shutting her eyes and making a grimace of pain.

"Go away," she said; "you hurt me, and you will awake dolly. Do you not see she is asleep?"

Then throwing the pillow aside, she leaped to her feet and rushed to a far corner of the room.

And she pointed wildly to some imaginary object, crying out, "What is that frightful being? See its glaring eyes! Oh, what is it—what is it?" and she screamed out again and again, ending in a burst of wild laughter.

"We have succeeded beyond my most sanguine expectations," said the doctor, as he left the room.

A few minutes after, Christine sunk, quite exhausted, into a chair.

"I am so glad he is gone," she said. "I was

getting quite tired, and my throat is as sore as if I had been singing all day."

"No wonder," replied Marie. "I never heard any one cry out so finely. I must congratulate Mademoiselle on the strength of her lungs."

"Oh, Marie, if you only knew how I longed to strike him or scratch him in my mad transports!"

"Never do that," was the answer, spoken with unusual gravity, "or you would see what effectual and severe means are sometimes resorted to to subdue refractory patients."

"Do you mean to say that Doctor Veroust actually punishes mad people—poor things who are not responsible for their actions?"

"Indeed I do. I have seen them rendered almost insensible by semi-drowning in the bath-room. I have known a man beaten till he could hardly stand; women faint for want of food. Only last year Guillaume caused the death of a man by striking him on the head with a heavy stick."

"But do not these dreadful things get known? When a patient is discharged, for instance, he would naturally complain of the treatment he had received."

"That does happen sometimes; but, after all, who would believe him? A man who has but just returned from an asylum is generally looked upon as more or less mad. Sometimes a case of sudden death is taken up and inquired into; as happened when Guillaume killed the man I mentioned. But Doctor Veroust brought up witnesses, among them myself, and we all swore that the man was most violent, and that Guillaume had to strike him in self-defense."

"But was that really the fact?" interposed Christine.

"No; the poor fellow was a tailor by trade, and Guillaume, thinking to have a suit of clothes made cheaply, bought some cloth, and set the man to work. The suit was almost completed, when one day he left him alone for a few minutes, and when he returned the cloth was all cut up into strips. Guillaume was furious with rage. Rushing up to the man, he struck him on the head with a stick he happened to have in his hand. I do not think he really intended to take his life, but this will serve to show you how entirely the inmates of an asylum are at the mercy of their keepers. You will, if you ever inquire into the matter, find how very seldom it is that a keeper is discharged. The fact is, they know too well what goes on; and, as a rule, doctors and keepers are on very good terms. If it were not for my mother, I would myself publish some of the crimes I have seen committed, for I should not care what became of me if I could be revenged on Doctor Veroust, but I could not betray him without implicating her!"

It was not for two days after this that Marie procured paper and ink for Christine to write to her aunt, but at last the letter was written. The difficulty was, how to post it; for Marie seldom got a holiday, and did not dare to give it any one to post for her.

Fate favored her, however. The next morning she entered the kitchen, where Jean was seated at breakfast.

"Good-morning, Mademoiselle Marie," he said. "Have you any commissions for me? I am going to the town at once."

"Oh, indeed," answered Marie. "What may take you there? Is it anything important? To the post, I suppose, for one thing, as I see you have the letter-bag?"

"Yes, I go to the post with a lot of letters for Monsieur, but I also have to call at the jeweler's for a small packet; doubtless a present for the bride. I hear the doctor contemplates marriage."

He eyed Marie inquisitively, but she showed no sign that his words had wounded her.

"To the jeweler," she said, ignoring the latter part of his speech. "If you will be so kind, perhaps you will take a brooch of mine, which requires a pin put to it. Just wait one moment, and I will get it for you."

She soon returned with in her hand.

"Now, see, Jean, that you are careful, and do not lose it. It is a brooch to which I attach great value. Let me see; the letter-bag will be the safest place. I will put it in myself."

He had slung the bag round over his shoulder, so could not see what Marie was about.

Quickly she took the letter from the pocket of her apron, and slipped it into the bag with the brooch.

"M. Ricard must not charge you more than ten sous for it. Mind you tell him so, Jean," she went on, quietly; all the time her heart beat with anxiety lest Jean should turn round and see her. She gave a sigh of relief as he started on his way, then hastening to Christine's room she told her the good news.

Christine began to count how long it would take before she could hope for any results from it. There would be two days for it to get to London; then, supposing Mrs. Blount should send some one to Lyons, that would take two days more. Ah! how she hoped that her aunt would herself come in search of her! How she longed to be clasped in those fond arms! But then, if her aunt came, she would have to make some preparations before undertaking the journey; she would hardly be able to start at a moment's notice.

Well, even supposing that no one came for a whole week—let the days pass ever so slowly—a week could not be very long.

She grew nervous and excited as the days slowly dragged themselves along. Five days passed, six, a whole week, and still nothing occurred. On the eighth day Marie entered the room in some agitation.

"Mademoiselle," she said, "I have news. Monsieur starts to-morrow for England; he has but just told me so. Nothing could be better for you, for I have determined that, should you hear nothing of your aunt in a few days, you shall regain your liberty without her. I have seen how this suspense is telling upon you; I feel that if you remain here much longer you will be really ill, and I will not allow that. Perhaps your letter has miscarried, or your aunt may be from home; at any rate, you shall no longer depend upon her. Doctor Veroust is to be married in less than a fortnight; he told me of it proudly, at the same time praising the beauty of his future wife. He showed me her portrait—she is lovely; even I must own as much. Perhaps he showed it to me to prove how impossible it is that he could now think of me; he might have spared me the humiliation. I hated him sufficiently before, and am reckless now. I care not for myself; I will follow him to Paris when he is married, and be revenged on him. I could have him arrested now on the charge of having caused the death of two or three patients; but I will not until he has made that beautiful woman his wife. How will she look, I wonder, when she learns that her husband is an assassin? She will turn from him in horror. Then, perhaps, he will sue for her love as I did for his, and she will spurn him. Ah!" she laughed, "I would give my life to see that—to see him on his knees, and his wife turn away from him with loathing. He would think of me then, and remember how I would have clung to him through all if he had but been true to me."

Christine endeavored to soothe her.

"Dear Marie, you are unlike yourself to-night. Think of her—how she would suffer too! I do not believe you really wish to harm a woman who has never knowingly wronged you. Oh, if you would but forget this wicked man! I believe you would be happier if you were once away from this frightful house. If I am lucky enough to escape, we could go away and live quietly together. Even if my aunt is dead, which I fear may be the case, and my grandparents refuse to believe that I am Christine Vira—even then we should manage. I am clever at my needle; I could earn something by sewing, or could perhaps give lessons in English and music. Oh, how pleasant it would be! I fancy I see us in some pretty cottage, not too near any town—no, we

must be where there are trees, and fields, and flowers. Ah!" she cried, in an ecstasy, "the happiness of walking once more in the open air, with nothing overhead but the sky and the free breath of heaven fanning one's temples! Marie, I believe I should never tire of hearing the birds sing."

The poor girl fell sobbing on Marie's neck. The thought of freedom unnerved her even more than the cruel hardships of her imprisonment.

"There!" said Marie, stroking the golden curls; "if you go on like that, I shall never be able to tell you what I have planned. Try and compose yourself, for I must not wait here long. To-day is Saturday. Next Friday my mother, taking advantage of Doctor Veroust's absence, intends to spend the evening with a friend; that, then, will be the time for us to fly. I will leave a note for my mother, telling her that I have started for Paris to await Monsieur's arrival there. She will think that, after my departure, finding yourself alone, you made your escape."

"But how could I do so with the door locked?" asked Christine.

"I have thought of that. I must turn the key in the lock when the door is not quite shut; she will, perhaps, think it was done by accident. Any way, we must risk that. It would not make much difference if she knew we were together; but I would rather she thought you had gone alone. She will know all before long. What I wish is for us to get a start before they commence a search for you. Monsieur does not think of returning before Sunday, and in three days after he starts for Paris for his wedding."

"Tell me, dear Marie," said Christine, fearful lest the girl should break out into another fit of wrath and jealousy—"tell me how you propose we shall make our escape? If we calmly walk out of the house, will not some of the servants see us, and insist upon detaining me?"

"Certainly they would, if we contemplated anything so rash; but I have no intention of letting them see us. You know my room; you were there once, I remember, the day I made you a present of my knitting."

"Dearest Marie, how I blessed you for it!"

"Well, to continue, you doubtless noticed that the window is large enough to permit us to pass through it. Do not look so startled! I do not mean that we shall jump; it is too far from the ground for that. We must tear your sheets into strips, and knot them firmly together. When we have what we consider a sufficient length, we will fasten it to the bed-post which is near the window, and must let ourselves down, hand under hand, until we reach the bottom. Do you think you could manage it?"

"Yes, indeed," said Christine; "I could do much more to effect my liberty. But why do you suggest tearing up the sheets? Could you not procure a rope without much difficulty?"

"Probably I could; but it would, in that case, be seen at once that you had had aid, whereas I prefer it to appear that you have made your escape alone."

"Oh, Marie, I can hardly realize that there is almost a certainty of my being free in six more days; and perhaps, after all, my aunt may come and fetch me even before that time. I do not know how it is, but the days seem longer and more unbearable now that I feel sure of my liberty. But tell me, Marie, shall we not want money? I have a little. Fortunately, I happened to have my purse in my pocket the night I was brought here. See," she said, taking a little purse, and emptying its contents into Marie's lap. "Over fifty francs; not a large fortune, but it will take us some distance, will it not?"

"Yes!" Marie exclaimed, in some surprise. "I had never thought of your having anything; but I am glad of it for your sake, for I may run short. I have one hundred and eighty francs; but we shall need it all, for I intend that you shall go to England. You say

that there was a strong resemblance between yourself and your mother; therefore, when your grandparents once see you, they will believe your story."

"And you, Marie—will you not come, too?"

"No," she answered, firmly; "I shall have other work to do."

And Christine felt that she referred to Doctor Veroust, and forbore to urge her further, knowing how useless it would be.

Doctor Veroust visited Christine the next morning, before he set out on his journey; and she had to keep up the farce of madness, as usual, whenever he came to see her, which was generally about once a week.

Either she was growing careless, or she was unable to act her part so well in her present excited state, but the doctor seemed anything but pleased with her appearance. He looked at her steadily once or twice, and then felt her pulse.

"I am not very satisfied with the state of Mademoiselle's health," he said to Marie, "I think it would be as well to administer a little more of the medicine like she took before—indeed, it would be better for her to take it twice a week during my absence. Stay! I will see her take the first dose myself."

He left the room, returning at the end of a few minutes with a small bottle and a glass.

Pouring out a few drops, he filled up the glass with water and handed it to Christine.

"There, drink that, dear child," he said, soothingly. "It will do you good."

Christine turned pale, and trembled with fear.

What could she do? She did not dare refuse, and if she swallowed the medicine she would, perhaps, be very ill.

Just then, Madame Roux's step was heard in the passage, and the doctor walked to the door and called her.

In that instant, Marie snatched the glass from Christine's hand, and drank its contents.

"Come here, Madame Roux," the doctor was saying. "I want to leave this bottle in your charge. I wish No. 6 to take some of it twice a week. Ah, she has drunk it!" he said, as he perceived the empty glass. "That is right. It is lucky for her that she is pretty tractable, for I am not given to standing any nonsense. Well, I must be off. The carriage is already at the door." Saying which, he left the room, followed by Madame Roux.

Christine threw herself on Marie's neck, and embraced her again and again.

"Oh, dear Marie! why did you do it? I shall never forgive myself if you suffer from taking this medicine! I ought to have taken it myself. Why should you suffer for me?"

"Because I am stronger," answered Marie. "I may be ill for a short time, but it will have less effect upon me than it would have had upon you. I must take care that I, and not my mother, bring you the next dose. There is no knowing what the consequences might be if you were forced to take much of it."

Poor Marie! When she went to bed that night, her head was racked with pain; and when at last she fell into a feverish sleep, she was haunted by fearful dreams.

When she entered Christine's room next morning, she still looked ill and pale.

She made light of it, though Christine saw she was still suffering.

"It is nothing," she said. "My head aches a little, that is all. I shall be quite well to-morrow. I tremble, though, when I think of the effect it might have had on your delicate frame. Perhaps, even, we should have had to relinquish our plan of escape, or, at least, have had to postpone it."

How anxiously Christine waited for that Friday night! It seemed as though the time would never pass.

Nothing was heard of her aunt, and Christine felt that should she fail in this attempt to escape, she would most probably be a prisoner here all her life.

She hardly knew how to repress her excite-

ment when at last the time for action had arrived.

Marie came in about eight o'clock in the evening, bearing a bundle, which contained a few of their clothes, a warm shawl and a hat for Christine; then shutting themselves in, they both set to work tearing up the sheets.

Christine made a poor hand of knotting them together. It is doubtful if it had been left to her if they would have reached the ground without a broken limb.

Luckily Marie understood such work better.

She had a cousin who was a sailor, and had learned from him how to tie a safe knot, little thinking when so learning, how useful the knowledge might prove to her.

Listening for a moment at the door, in case any one should be near, they passed into Marie's room, bearing their long rope with them.

Christine gave a sigh of intense happiness as she paused for a moment by the open window, drinking in the freshness of the cold night air.

But Marie would not let her waste time in that way.

"Come," she said. "Which of us is to descend first? I have already attached the rope firmly to the bedpost."

"I will," answered Christine, without a moment's hesitation, though the window was a great distance from the ground.

She stepped out on to the sill, then taking the rope firmly in her hands, let herself down.

It was a more difficult task than she had calculated on. Her body swayed against the wall, and her knuckles were bruised by the stones; but at last she felt the soft earth beneath her feet, and shook the rope, as a signal to Marie that she was safe.

A few moments later the two girls were hurrying along the garden.

The night was dark, though a few stars shone overhead.

More than once they stumbled over the root of a tree, and Christine gave a sudden half-suppressed cry of alarm as a cold branch swept across her face.

"I fear we have missed the path," whispered Marie. "But never mind; we have but to keep straight on, and we must come to the wall. I hope you are good at climbing, for we must scale it."

As she spoke, she almost fell forward into a ditch.

"Take care," she called out to Christine, who was close behind. "Here we are, at the end of the garden. We must walk over this soft ground, and, for all I know, there may be water in the ditch; but we cannot jump, for it is too wide, and there is no firm foothold on the other side. Keep close to me."

They stepped bravely forward, their feet sinking deep into the soft earth, and both gave a little gasp as they splashed suddenly into water which reached over their ankles.

"What is the matter?" Marie asked, as Christine paused. "What are you waiting for?"

"I have lost my shoe," answered Christine. "Oh, whatever shall I do? How can I get on now? I cannot find it, for it has sunk in the mud."

"It cannot be helped," Marie said, taking her by the wrist and pulling her forward. "We must get on, come what may. I will get on top of the wall first. There, that is accomplished; now hand me the bundle; now feel for a foothold, and give me your hand."

This was done, and they were now standing on the top; then Marie threw down the bundle, and jumped after it.

"Now, mademoiselle, can you see just a glimmer of my white apron? You must jump straight for it, and I will endeavor to catch you in my arms; for should you alight upon a stone, you might bruise your foot and be unable to walk to the station."

Christine did as she was desired; the result was, the two girls found themselves lying on the road; but fortunately they were unhurt.

They had not proceeded far before Christine began to limp; her foot was cut and bleeding

from the stones. She bore it bravely for some time in silence, but at last the pain became unendurable, and she begged of her companion to rest a little.

"How thoughtless I am!" said Marie. "I had quite forgotten your foot. Here, I will tie our handkerchiefs round it, so that you may not feel the stones so much."

She knelt on the ground, and was about to do as she said, when she caught sight of carriage lamps quickly approaching. She sprang once more to her feet.

"Quick!" she cried. "Let us keep close to the opposite hedge. I would rather no one saw us until we are further from the asylum."

They both crouched together as close as they could, hoping that they would not be discovered in the darkness. But as the carriage drew near, the lamps flashed upon them, and the horse shied, refusing to pass.

"Why don't you drive on?" said a voice, which made the girls tremble with fear. It was Doctor Veroust!

"I can't, sir," answered the coachman; "my horse is startled by something in the hedge, and won't move."

"Then get down and lead him," was the reply.

"Why it's nothing but a couple of girls, after all," the man said, with an oath. "What are you hiding here, for? Up to no good, I'll be bound."

"Two girls hiding, did you say?" and Doctor Veroust sprang from the carriage. In a moment he discovered Marie and Christine, and instantly understood the facts of the case.

"Here, leave your horse and help me with these women; they have escaped from my house."

Christine struggled to free herself from the doctor's arms, but she was like a child in his grasp.

The coachman would have held Marie, but she shook him off.

"Do not touch me," she cried; sternly; "even Doctor Veroust dare not say that I am mad."

"No," said he; "but she is assisting a patient to escape, and we must detain them both."

It is doubtful how all this would have ended, for Marie would not have been mastered without a struggle.

So occupied had they all been, that two carriages had approached quite close before they were aware of them.

Marie was the first to see them, and she called out loudly for assistance.

"Hullo! what is wrong here?" cried the nearest coachman, as he pulled up sharply.

"A lunatic, escaped from Doctor Veroust's asylum!" answered the man, who was still endeavoring to seize Marie. "Doctor Veroust himself is here."

"Doctor Veroust!" exclaimed each and all of the occupants of the two carriages.

And, soon, no less than four gentlemen and a lady joined the group.

"Gentlemen, I appeal to you," said Marie. "I am aiding this young lady to escape because she is not mad. She has suffered greatly at Doctor Veroust's hands, and I am ready to bear witness to the fact."

"Mercy on us!" cried the lady, who had now drawn near to Christine; "it is my niece!"

And she folded the poor girl, who was half-faint with fear, fondly to her breast.

"My poor, dear child!" she exclaimed, embracing her warmly; "what you must have suffered! How thankful I am that we have arrived in time to save you!"

It was Mrs. Blount, who, accompanied by her legal adviser, had come to deliver Christine.

A gentleman, stepping forward, laid his hand on the doctor's shoulder. He was no other than the chief of police from Lyons.

"I arrest you, Antoine Veroust, on the charge of falsely imprisoning Christine Vira, and treating her as a lunatic, though you

knew her to be in perfect possession of her senses."

"And I," said Marie, can testify to his having caused the death of Jacques Fernand and Jeanne Le Blanc by cruelty and lack of proper nourishment!"

The doctor spoke not; but he fixed a look on Marie, the expression of which was so full of hatred and malice that she shrunk from him out of the light of the lamps.

The other two gentlemen were Wilfred Grey and Auguste Le Roy. When Doctor Veroust caught sight of the latter, he smiled grimly.

"So you are against me, too, M. Le Roy? At any rate, you will have the satisfaction of knowing that your beloved Juliette is as guilty as I am in all that concerns this young lady."

"I know it!" answered the young man, hotly, "and I do but seek to be revenged upon you both!"

"Mr. Grey," said Mrs. Blount, imploringly, "do help me to carry this poor child to the carriage; she is trembling with cold and fear while we stand here talking!"

But Christine had hold of Marie's hand, and would not let it go.

"Aunt Claire," she asked, "do not leave Marie behind. Let her come with me."

"Of course, dear!" Mrs. Blount answered, kindly. "Get into the carriage also, my good girl. I know what a friend you have been to my niece, and you shall not be unrewarded."

Few words were spoken as they drove to Lyons. Christine clung to her aunt as though fearful lest she might yet be recaptured, and that lady clasped her closely, and kissed and soothed her as though she were fondling a sick child.

Marie looked on with a strange pain at her heart. How happy they were! Christine did not want her now, she told herself. No one wanted her—no one loved her!

When the carriage stopped before the entrance to a large hotel, she slipped quietly away unperceived.

Meanwhile, Mr. Grey, Mr. Wilson, and M. Le Roy had already arrived, and were holding a little consultation.

"What do you intend to do?" Wilfred was asking the lawyer. "I suppose you will telegraph to the police to-morrow morning, and have Madame Veroust and her daughter arrested?"

"I think not," replied Mr. Wilson. "Mrs. Blount wishes to have everything done as quietly as possible. I shall start for England myself to-morrow, accompanied by a detective from this town, and shall see that they are arrested with as much secrecy as possible, and brought quietly. I feel sure that Squire Chiltern would wish to avoid all possible scandal."

"I suppose Mademoiselle Juliette's sentence will be a severe one?" questioned Auguste, quietly.

"Probably a term of imprisonment from ten to fifteen years at least," answered the lawyer.

Auguste shuddered. It was painful to him to think of his love—his beautiful Juliette, in prison.

His mind was filled with conflicting emotions as he walked to his lodgings a few minutes later. True, he told himself, she had proved that she did not love him—had deceived him cruelly; but he could not forget the many happy days they had passed together. Even as children he had ever been her little friend and champion. Should he not try to save her now? He took out his watch, and paused under a lamp-post to examine it. Half-past ten, and the mail started for Paris at eleven.

He hurried to his room, and, putting some money into his purse, threw a few clothes into a traveling-bag, and hastened to the station.

He was but just in time. Before he had well realized what he was about, he found himself already in the railway carriage, being borne swiftly on his way.

CHAPTER VI.

It is right that we should now give some explanation of how Mrs. Blount, Wilfred Grey,

and Auguste Le Roy happened to arrive all together, and at so opportune a moment for Christine.

When Mr. Grey reached Lyons, nearly a fortnight later than he intended, owing to some business which had detained him in London, he drove straight to a hotel, had some refreshment, lighted a cigar, and strolled quietly along in the direction of Queen Street. Madame Veroust's house was situated in this street, and—yes, there was the house, and still unoccupied, with the words "To Let!" painted in white, on the windows.

Next door was a pastry-cook's, and he turned in, in the hope of gaining some information.

There was a pretty girl behind the counter. He commenced the conversation by giving a large order for cakes and *bonbons*.

"Perhaps Mademoiselle could inform him how long the house next door had been vacant?" And Mademoiselle, who was not averse to a little gossip, in a very few minutes told him the whole story, most of which he had known perfectly well already.

"The saddest part of it all," concluded the girl, "is that Mademoiselle Juliette was engaged to be married to Monsieur Auguste Le Roy, and the poor young man looks more melancholy and desponding each day. He passes this door on his way to the office in the next street, and my heart bleeds for him! Ah, it is worse than death to lose one's reason!" she said, sighing. "And Mademoiselle Juliette was so beautiful, so very beautiful!"

Here Wilfred interrupted her by taking a photograph from his pocket, and handing it to her.

"Why, monsieur," she exclaimed, "it is actually Mademoiselle Juliette herself! And here I have been chatting away, telling Monsieur what doubtless he knew far better than I do! Perhaps Monsieur is a friend of the family?"

Wilfred laughed, but made no reply. Taking up his purchases, and wondering much what he should do with them, he left the shop.

A couple of little gamins, ragged and dirty, were gazing into the windows, their hungry looks fixed on the tempting sweets spread out there in such lavish profusion.

Opening the bags, Wilfred divided their contents between them, and left them standing open-mouthed with astonishment, and too utterly overcome by such generosity to speak.

"That must be an angel come down to feed us!" said the younger, looking after the retreating figure of their benefactor with awe and admiration. "Who else would give us such cakes? Just look, brother; they are neither stale nor broken, but the richest in the whole place—all chocolate, and sugar, and cream! Oh, my gracious! What a feast we will have!"

Wilfred's next visit was to the police office, and he very soon laid the facts of the case before M. Pitard, the chief.

"It is rather a delicate case," said M. Pitard, musingly. "You seem to have so little to go upon."

"I cannot see that," answered Wilfred. "I told you that the girl in the confectioner's shop identified the photograph of the lady calling herself Christine Vira as an exact portrait of Juliette Veroust."

"Still," said M. Pitard, "I should have liked some further proof; photographs are so deceptive. Doctor Veroust bears a high character here. I will, however, accompany you to the lodgings of M. le Roy. I know him well; he is an exemplary young man. If there has been any plot, he certainly is not aware of it. He will at least, though, be able to give us a full description of the two young ladies."

They found Auguste Le Roy at home. His astonishment and rage knew no bounds when he heard how he had been fooled and deceived. He recognized Juliette's photograph beyond a doubt; he himself possessed one exactly similar to it, on which her name was written. He described Christine, showing the great dissimilarity which existed between them; and volunteered, moreover, to accompany M. Pitard and

Wilfred that very evening to the asylum in order to identify Christine. He was ready to do anything, for he was furious at the thought of Juliette's falseness.

But M. Pitard suggested that it would be time enough if they went there the next morning.

When Mr. Grey returned to his hotel, he found in the hall a little stout gentleman, of unmistakable English origin, endeavoring to ask some questions of a waiter in very bad French. The waiter who persisted in trying to talk English, succeeded in making himself equally unintelligible.

"Perhaps I can be of some assistance to you," said Wilfred, going forward.

The little man looked up suspiciously; but was apparently prepossessed by Wilfred's appearance. He smiled and thanked him.

"I fear," he said, "I have forgotten a good deal of my French since my school days. I find I am not able to ask the simplest questions. Perhaps you know this city, and can inform me where I shall find the police-station?"

"Certainly," answered Wilfred. "I have but just returned from there."

"Indeed!" said the stranger. "Will you further oblige by asking the people here if they know of a Doctor Veroust, who keeps a lunatic asylum a few miles from here?"

Wilfred started. This seemed more than a coincidence.

"It is very strange, sir, but I have myself been making inquiries about this same Doctor Veroust."

"Bless me! You don't say so! Might I ask if your visit to the police was in any way connected with this gentleman?"

"It was," answered Wilfred; "and I am going to call at the asylum to-morrow morning. If you will come up-stairs to my room we could talk more at our ease. It strikes me as being just possible we may have arrived here on the same errand, and if so it would perhaps be more advantageous for us to work together."

Explanations soon followed, and Wilfred learned that his little friend was Mrs. Blount's legal adviser, and that she herself was at that moment in the hotel.

Mr. Wilson hurried off to inform her that Mr. Grey, the cousin of Christine Vira, had also arrived on the same business as themselves.

He soon returned with a request that Mr. Grey would come to Mrs. Blount's apartments at once.

She had been much excited since her arrival only an hour before, and had insisted that Mr. Wilson should immediately communicate with the police, in order that they should that very evening restore Christine to liberty.

"I shall never forgive myself," she said, "for being from home when the poor child's letter arrived. What must she have endured at the thought that I let the days go by and made no effort to rescue her? It is impossible to say what torture that man, that fiend I should say, may not have made her suffer!"

When Wilfred entered, he found Mrs. Blount pacing up and down the room in great agitation.

She came forward and took his hand.

"How strange that we should both arrive here with the same object, and on the very same day! Mr. Wilson tells me you propose not going to the asylum before to-morrow. I cannot postpone my visit until then. I think what that poor child may be suffering; we must not allow her to remain a single hour in the power of Doctor Veroust more than is absolutely possible. I propose that we drive immediately to the asylum, M. Pitard accompanying us."

"Perhaps it would be better for M. Le Roy to come also," said Wilfred.

"Certainly; it is a great many years since I have seen my niece; she may be much altered; but this young man was, probably, well acquainted with her, as he was engaged to Juliette, and will be able to recognize her at once."

Mr. Grey volunteered to go in search of M. Pitard and Auguste, and Mr. Wilson went with him.

Mrs. Blount entered her bedroom, and began to put on her bonnet and shawl.

"You surely will not go out, madame," said her maid, "before eating something? You have had no dinner."

"Oh, Louise!" her mistress answered, sinking into a chair, "I am so excited at the thought of seeing that poor dear girl, that I cannot think of anything else. Get me a little wine, it is impossible for me to eat."

Louise went out, soon returning with the wine; but she brought a plate of chicken also.

"Come, madame, you must not refuse to try and take a little; suppose you should faint on the road, and not be able to go as far as the asylum?"

Mrs. Blount allowed herself to be persuaded, and managed to swallow a few mouthfuls.

"Louise," she said, looking round, "I think my niece would prefer sleeping in my room to-night, she may be nervous. Give orders for another bed to be made up here, and have a fire lighted; it is chilly this evening. Poor child! I wish that she should see everything looking pleasant and cheerful. You might go out and buy some flowers, and fill these vases; I dare say she hasn't seen any for months. Hark! I hear a carriage stopping outside. Go see, Louise; it may be Mr. Wilson and Mr. Grey returned."

"You are right, madame," said the girl, looking from the window; "and they are accompanied by two gentlemen."

"Thank goodness!" exclaimed Mrs. Blount, with a sigh of relief. "Then we can start immediately! Follow me with these shawls. We may be glad of them." And she hurried down the stairs.

So it happened that Christine was rescued, owing to the indefatigable efforts of her aunt. Had her friends not come before the next day, there is no knowing what fresh troubles she would have experienced.

"What a charming morning, is it not, grand-papa?" cried Juliette, for we will now call her by her right name. "The first glimpse of spring? I shall go directly after breakfast; and see if there are not any snowdrops out yet in the park. Will you not come, too, madame?"

"No, indeed!" answered Madame Veroust. "It is too dreary under those great trees. I prefer to stay in, and finish my book by the fire."

Juliette was feeling happy and at ease at Chiltern Manor now. She had grown so to love this luxurious life; she wondered sometimes how she could ever have put up with the existence she had previously led in Lyons. She smiled as she thought how she would now miss her pretty carriage, with its handsome ponies; her thoroughbred riding horse, her costly dresses, the thousand and one little luxuries which went to make up her present life. In three months more she would go to London, and would be presented. Her head was full of the anticipated pleasures of this her first season in England, as she stepped lightly along through the park, swinging a little basket in one hand.

A man was just coming through the lodge gates, walking quickly. "What a hurry he is in!" she thought. Then something in his figure seemed to strike her. She watched him eagerly as he approached.

"It is Auguste Le Roy!" she cried, amazed. "What can bring him here?"

She stood still, trembling and white with fear, awaiting him. She knew well that he must have heard all, or he would not have come.

"Juliette!" he said, coming close to her, and laying his hand eagerly on her arm. "How fortunate that I have found you alone and so soon! I come to warn you! You must fly! All is discovered!"

"What is discovered?" she said, drawing herself up proudly. "Tell me what you mean?"

He frowned impatiently.

"There is no time for trifling!" he said, in a

hard, stern voice. "Think you I should have traveled night and day for nothing? Christine has escaped from the asylum, and Doctor Veroust is already in prison. In two days, at latest, you and Madame Veroust will be arrested! You see there is no time to be lost; you and your mother must leave here immediately!"

She realized her position instantly.

"Yes; we must go at once; but where? If we could but gain a few days it would be something!"

"I think Paris will be best for the present," he answered. "Once there, we can arrange what is best to be done. Go now to the house; inform Madame what has occurred; order a carriage, and drive to Blexby; you can pick me up on the road. If we lose no time, we may catch the London express."

Juliette was about to hurry to the house; but she paused a moment, and held out her hand.

"Auguste, can you ever forgive me? You have saved me; it is more than I deserved!"

He took the hand, and raised it passionately to his lips. Strive as he might, he could no more help loving her than he could help living.

"I tell you I won't believe a word of it!" said the Squire, trying to work himself up into a passion, to hide his evident agitation. He was closeted in his study with Mr. Wilson, who had arrived a short time before. "I insist upon believing that the young lady who so unaccountably left her home two days ago is really my granddaughter. I have no doubt that she will return soon, and explain everything satisfactorily."

"I think not, sir," answered Mr. Wilson, dryly. "If you will allow me, I will once more go over the facts of the case, and—"

"I tell you I will not listen!" roared the Squire. "If she is not my granddaughter, I refuse utterly and emphatically to acknowledge any other. I insist upon your taking no further proceedings against this young lady. Do you hear, sir? I insist that she shall not be followed nor molested!"

"I am acting for Mrs. Blount, Miss Vira's aunt," said the lawyer, coldly.

"Then you can let her know my wishes on the subject. You say you have got the girl out of the asylum; I don't see what more you want."

Mr. Wilson rose to depart; he saw it was utterly useless to argue further. After all, perhaps the wisest thing would be to write to Mrs. Blount. She might not wish to go against the Squire in the matter.

By return of post came the answer, saying that Christine herself was most anxious that no further steps should be taken.

"I am very much troubled about my niece," Mrs. Blount wrote. "She has been very unwell since you were here. The young girl who assisted her to escape has mysteriously disappeared; in fact, no one has seen her since the night she drove with us to Lyons. Her mother, a woman named Madame Roux, has been arrested as Doctor Veroust's accomplice, and shocking revelations are expected to be made about the asylum. It is thought that this woman, in the hopes of mitigating her own sentence, will confess."

Poor Christine was indeed very ill, suffering from a low fever brought on by excitement and exposure to the night air after her long confinement. She dreaded the day of the trial, for she would be compelled to be present, and felt nervous at the thought of having to give her evidence before so many people.

This last ordeal, however, was spared her in a way no one had looked for.

The very morning of the trial Doctor Veroust was found dead in the prison. He had taken poison, but how he had been able to procure it was never proved. Madame Roux, owing to the insufficiency of evidence against her, was discharged.

Poor Marie's fate was ascertained shortly after. Her body was found one morning by some washerwomen among the rushes on the river's brink. She had been dead many days.

Christine was greatly affected by this sad news of her poor friend, and bitterly blamed

herself that she had lost sight of Marie for a moment. It had so had an effect on her health that Mrs. Blount insisted upon their starting for Cannes immediately, where she intended to stay some months, in the hope that an entire change of scene would keep Christine's mind from dwelling so much on the past.

Wilfred Grey accompanied them south. He had taken a great fancy to his little cousin, and Christine liked nothing better than to sit near the window in the hotel, gazing listlessly on the deep blue of the Mediterranean, while he read to her.

Wilfred, as he looked at her, forgot the long years that had passed, and almost fancied it was Mabel who was listening to him.

As the days went on, Christine grew stronger, and was able to take long drives into the country with her aunt and cousin.

How pleasant those drives were; how bravely their little Barb ponies climbed the hill, and then what glorious glimpses of the sea! The soft, balmy air that fanned their temples came bearing with it the sweet scent of the orange tree. Those were happy days; but, by-and-by, a little cloud came over their horizon. No one seemed quite to know how it began; a feeling of constraint, a coolness, gradually arose between Wilfred Grey and his cousin.

Ever since their arrival at Cannes he had gone to some trouble to procure a bouquet for Christine, and each morning she found it by her place at breakfast. She loved such little attentions from him, and generally wore for the rest of the day one of the roses or a few of the fine St. Jean violets of which her bouquet was composed; but latterly she had omitted to do this, and Wilfred thought she no longer cared for his little offering; so one day there were no flowers, and Christine shed a few tears over their loss when she was alone.

One evening, a telegram came for Mr. Grey to say the Squire was dead. He would have to start immediately for England, in order to be in time for the funeral.

"Dear Wilfred, how we shall miss you!" said Mrs. Blount. They had grown very intimate during the close intercourse of the last few weeks. "I really do not know what we shall do without you."

He glanced at Christine, but she was bending over some needle-work and made no remark. Presently, she rose and stepped out through the open window, onto the balcony.

"Christine will not miss me much, I think," he said, a little bitterly. "I'm afraid my company often annoys her."

"Why should you think that?" asked Mrs. Blount.

"There is so much difference in our ages," he replied, gloomily; "it is too much to expect that a young girl should care for my society. I fear I have done a rash thing for my own peace of mind in coming here; I ought to have gone back to England when we left Lyons."

"Oh, how blind, how very blind, you men are! See!" continued Mrs. Blount, laying one hand on his, and pointing with the other toward the window; "Christine looks very pretty out there, does she not, with the soft moonbeams falling on her hair? Shall I tell you what her thoughts are? I can read them as well as if I could see into her pure, loving heart. She is thinking how hopeless is the love she bears you, and wondering what the days will be like when you are gone."

"Do you really think it possible she can care for me?"

"Go and ask her yourself; you will soon know."

With what a glad heart he joined the young girl on the balcony! She started as she heard his step, and turned away her head, but not before he had perceived traces of tears on her cheeks. He took her two little trembling hands in his.

"Are you angry with me?" he said, very tenderly.

"Angry? Oh, cousin Wilfred, no! How could I be angry? You, who are so kind, so

good! It is that I feared I had offended you, because—because—"

"Christine, answer me!"—and his voice was hoarse with emotion—"tell me that you do not hate me—that some day you will even try to love me! Oh, my darling!"—her head had sunk upon his breast now, and she was weeping happy tears,— "my little wife! It is too great happiness to think that you can love me. Tell me, my child, could you really be happy with a man almost old enough to be your father?"

Raising her head, she gave him one timid, tender glance, and Wilfred clasped her to him. What need of words where looks could speak so well? It would be happiness to die now, Christine thought; but to him it seemed life had but just begun.

"So you have made it up," Mrs. Blount said, as they entered the drawing-room a few minutes later. "Do you know it is nearly twelve o'clock? I dare say," she said, addressing Wilfred, "that you have not thought of telling your man to pack up yet?"

He was bound to acknowledge he had made no arrangements for the morrow's journey; so wishing them both good night, he went to give the necessary instructions.

"Aunt Claire, I have so much to tell you," said Christine, with hot cheeks, seating herself on a stool at Mrs. Blount's feet. "I do not know how to begin. It will so surprise you."

"Shall I guess what this important news is?" asked her aunt, smiling, and tenderly smoothing the golden curls. "Is it that Wilfred Grey has told you he loves you, and you have promised one day to be his wife? My pet, I saw it all so long ago! I suppose we must be thinking of returning to England now before long. May will soon be here, and Cannes will be getting too warm. What do you say, little one, to our starting in a fortnight? Do you think Wilfred will be glad to see us by then?"

"I think you are the very best of all good aunts," said Christine, kissing her warmly; "and I believe I am the very happiest girl in all the world."

Just one last look at Chiltern Manor.

It is more than three months since the Squire was carried to the family vault, and Mrs. Chiltern looks ten years younger. Her old nervous fits occur very seldom now. She never speaks of her husband but with the utmost affection, and almost persuades herself that she will never get over his loss.

"Yet one would think she is almost happy this evening, as she trips from room to room to see that everything looks comfortable and home-like for the expected guests. Her deep widow's mourning and snow-white cap suit her marvelously well.

"Surely," she asks Abigail, for the hundredth time, "It is time they arrived? There! I hear the sound of wheels upon the gravel; it must be they at last!"

The door was thrown open, and Mrs. Blount and Christine entered, followed by Wilfred.

The old lady tried to welcome her guests, and receive them with proper dignity, but she quite broke down.

"My darling," she said, throwing herself into Christine's arms, "it is like having my own Mabel back to me!" And she let her head fall on the young girl's shoulders.

What a pleasant evening that was! They all had so much to say, and sat up chatting until it was quite late.

"You must live with me now, my dear," said Mrs. Chiltern to her granddaughter.

"But I look upon Christine as my daughter," put in Mrs. Blount.

"I think I have a stronger claim than either," said Wilfred, laughing.

"You!" exclaimed his aunt, in astonishment. "Yes, I," he repeated; "for Christine has promised to be my wife."

"My dear boy, I am so glad!" cried the old lady. "And you will both live here, of course? Oh, Wilfred, if you only make her as kind a husband as dear William was to me, she will indeed be happy!"

And she shed a few silent tears as a tribute to the Squire's memory."

Poor loyal old lady! Almost the only kind thing he ever did was when he died and made her a widow.

"Grandmamma!"

"Yes, dear"—the old lady passed her hand lovingly over the golden curls which rested on her lap—for Christine had taken a stool at her feet.

"There is one thing I should like before I go to bed to night. I have so often heard my mother speak of this dear old house. I long to see the rooms she occupied; and Wilfred says there is a portrait of her in the picture gallery, painted when she was a young girl."

"Will you not wait until to-morrow, Christine?" said Mrs. Blount; "you must be tired, my child. Wait until then, and we will go through the house together. There is always something interesting in an old family mansion."

"Please do not be offended, Aunt Claire; but I think I should like to see these rooms alone, first."

"Well, well, child; have your own way."

"Abigail will show them to you, dear," said her grandmother. "She was your mother's maid; but I fear you will find the rooms very different to what they were when my poor girl occupied them. I had always wished them to remain as they were when she left us; but it was not to be."

Mrs. Chiltern sighed, and a tear stole slowly down her withered cheek.

"This is the boudoir, Miss Christine," and Abigail threw open the door, and stood aside to let the young girl pass. "The dressing-room leads out of it and the bedroom is beyond. They are a handsome suite of rooms, but very different to what they were in my dear young mistress's time."

Christine stood on the threshold, with a troubled look on her sweet face. The room appeared to have been lately occupied. A garden hat was thrown carelessly on the window seat; near it an overturned basket half-full of withered violets. A water color sketch, unfinished, lay on the table; but the flowers in the vases were faded and dry, and the dust lay thick over everything:

"Nothing has been touched since Miss Juliette left," said Abigail, softly. "It was the Squire's wish. This is the first time the room has been opened since his death."

"It was her room, then, too," said Christine, thoughtfully. "Did he love her very much?"

"Ay, that he did, miss! Many's the time I have heard him come here at night, when he has thought everybody was in bed, and pace up and down for hours together. Shall we go on to the other rooms?"

"No, not to-night. I thought I should have found something that would have reminded me of my mother; but these are Juliette's rooms—everything speaks of her presence."

She turned away with a weary sigh. Wilfred was waiting for her outside. "I knew you would be disappointed, darling," he said, drawing her hand within his arm; "but there is still the portrait. Shall we go and see it? You might have stood for the model yourself—it is marvelously like you."

They walked down the long corridor, and entered a room on the right. Christine was very silent. The little boudoir she had left had brought Juliette forcibly before her—she was thinking what that proud, ambitious girl must have suffered, preparing for her hurried departure, then flying, like a thief, from the home she had learnt to love so well, and staked so much to win.

A slight pressure of her hand against Wilfred's side brought her thoughts back to the present; they were standing before her mother's picture.

Christine gave a little cry of astonishment as, raising her eyes, she met those of the portrait; she might almost have been gazing at her own reflection in the glass—yet there was

something different, and she could not at once discover what it was.

"Wilfred," she said, looking up in his face somewhat puzzled, "what is there in the expression of the portrait that I have not?"

He stooped down and kissed her fondly before replying, "Dearest, your mother had never known trouble when that was painted; she was light-hearted, with the happiness of a child. But there is a depth of sadness still in your eyes which, with Heaven's help, I will try to change in time."

They had turned away, and were slowly leaving the room, when Christine stopped suddenly, and clasped her companion's arm in some agitation.

"Oh, Wilfred, look!—it is Juliette!"

There was some excuse for her nervousness; the painting was so exquisitely executed that one might almost think Juliette herself stood before them.

"How beautiful she is! Wilfred, I cannot bear to think that we cannot even learn where she is."

"My darling, why distress yourself about her? I daresay she is happier than she deserves—perhaps married to Auguste Le Roy."

"No, Wilfred; Auguste would never marry her after she had so deceived him. He rescued her from a sense of duty, but he would consider her unworthy to bear his name."

A little crowd was collected outside the Kursaal at Monte Carlo.

"What is wrong?" asks a young man of his companion, whose superior height enables him to command a better view.

Before he can answer, the crowd divides, and a lady walks through their midst, escorted by two gendarmes.

She flashes her black eyes defiantly on the people as she passes. She has been detected cheating at the gambling-tables.

There is something familiar about the haughty carriage of the beautiful head, the queenly grace of the perfect figure.

Was it Juliette?

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